

CAREER FICTIONS: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE CAREER IN THE
VICTORIAN NOVEL

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Career Fictions: The Representation of the Career in the Victorian Novel explores the impact on the novel of what sociologists have termed “professionalization,” the complex pattern of sociological and economic change through which Britain was transformed from a semi-feudal aristocratic culture in the eighteenth century to a nation of job-holders in the nineteenth. As I show, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the definition of what it meant to be a “professional” underwent a radical change, as traditional occupations that had been considered trades in the eighteenth century, such as surgeons and apothecaries, as well as newer occupations that arose to meet the industrial revolution’s increasing demand for technical specialization, were invested with a much higher degree of public authority than they had been in the past. My dissertation examines the challenges this process presented to novelists, arguing that the expansion of the division of labor and increased specialization in society brought about a fundamental shift in the novelistic representation of work.

One of the chief concerns of the dissertation is to show how the older Protestant notion of the “vocation,” understood as a calling to serve a higher purpose, comes into conflict with the “profession” in the nineteenth century novel. Professionalism, in which individual desire is made to conform to certain codes of social uniformity built around the workplace, was a widely celebrated ideal among the British middle-class in

the nineteenth century, but many Victorian novelists, from Dickens to Hardy, were particularly attuned to the way it could force individuals into positions of social alienation. Lydgate in Middlemarch, for instance, begins the novel with a “vocation,” in the sense that he’s experienced a spiritual calling to create something new in medicine, but ends with a “profession:” an “excellent practice” we’re told, but certainly not the future he’d envisioned for himself as a young man. Broadly-speaking, the vocation relies on an ideal projection of an imagined social community that a character can improve through his or her work, while the profession signifies an occupation a character enters into for the purpose of securing a social standing and the necessities of life. In my dissertation, I explore the conflict between these two modes in Eliot’s Middlemarch, Dickens’s David Copperfield, and Hardy’s The Return of the Native.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joseph Cannon Murtagh grew up in the Finger Lakes region of NY State, where he still resides. He was the recipient of the 2004 Mid-American Review Creative Nonfiction Award, and the winning essay “To Noah Daniel Kooperman” was published in the Spring 2005 issue of MAR. He has taught writing and literature courses at Cornell and Auburn Correctional Facility. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, writing, and playing music.

To my parents

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CHAPTER 1

VOCATION, PROFESSION, AND THE NARRATIVE OF THE VICTORIAN CAREER

The story of a young, ambitious person trying to figure out what to do with his or her life is so ubiquitous in Victorian fiction that it's tempting to class it as a genre all to itself, a variation on the *Bildungsroman* that dominated European high society during the eighteenth century. The career becomes something of an organizing force in nineteenth century fiction, a means of appeal to a reading public for whom the career was the primary means of advancement in a modern, secular society. As a subject of interest, the career has its own narrative cohesion, its own set of dramatic characteristics that are especially suited to representation in fiction: there's a self-contained story arc, with a beginning, middle, and an end; a central hero who in picaresque fashion must choose which among a number of possible life paths is the best match for his own talents; a world to throw up obstacles that either prove too great for the hero's strength, or are overcome through patient self-mastery and discipline; and a denouement that runs the gamut between success and failure. As the growing critical literature on nineteenth century professionalism has demonstrated, the prevalence of the career in nineteenth century fiction stems from the Victorian fascination with autobiographies of "great men"¹ – Mill, Carlyle, Darwin, Smiles, Trollope – whose lives reflect the arc of a calling of some sort, whether in literature, science, or industry, autobiographies in which it is the successful completion of a calling, and not the mere fact of existence, that makes a life worthy of remembrance, not "knowing oneself" – to paraphrase Thomas Carlyle – but knowing what "one can

¹ See especially the work of Alan Mintz, *George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), 21-53.

work at.” Carlyle’s view in Sartor Resartus that “a certain inarticulate self-consciousness dwells dimly in us...which only our works can render articulate decisively discernable,” that “our works are the mirror wherein the spirit first sees its natural lineaments” (129), reflects the opinions of a secular age that saw the greatness of life as commensurate with producing works of lasting value and believed that this process wasn’t necessarily a matter of rational free-will, but the fostering of a subconscious growth in which each of the individual parts contains the seeds of a meaningful and unified whole. To join this growth with purposeful work, to direct it towards a some worthy goal: these were the ambitions of an era whose highest ideal was working for the betterment of society, and whose narratives of professional upward mobility, to quote Nicholas Dames, “demonstrate the emergence of a discrete form of individual life-plan, a ‘making one’s own way’ that is bound by new imperatives and new difficulties” (247).

The idea of the career in the nineteenth century derives from the Protestant notion of the calling, in which an individual expresses his devotion to God by discovering the true nature of his calling, but it loses its religious connotation among the nineteenth century professional class, for whom the calling was largely a secular affair.² By the mid-nineteenth century, the career had become aligned with a demand for originality in the secular fields of art, literature, and industry, as a host of new occupations opened up for members of the expanding British middle-class: these were the result of the increased living standards and technological innovations of the industrial revolution and they made the prospect of discovering the particular employment for which one’s nature was suited a more daunting and challenging task than had been the case in earlier centuries. More often than not, pursuing a career in the nineteenth

² For the religious foundations of the calling, see Max Weber The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London: Routledge, 1992), 79-91.

century entailed a dynamic break with the customs and traditions of the past; as Burton Bledstein has noted, “the new type of professional man, personally struggled to create his career, he did not inherit it. He rejected the social forms and the public conviviality associated with the shallow intellect of the older learned professions” (177). Calculating, shrewd, competitive, and ambitious, the nineteenth century professional reflected the changes that working life in Britain had undergone between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as the nation evolved from a semi-feudal aristocracy, in which the majority of wealth was concentrated in private holdings of land, into a nation of jobholders, in which traditional forms of economic relationship were replaced by the growth of private industry. It’s against this backdrop that the development of the modern career takes center stage; in the latter half of the nineteenth century, changes in the social and economic order, a process that sociologists call “professionalization,” greatly expanded the scope and marketing power of the professions: by 1895, at least fifteen different occupations, from engineering to architecture, were professionalized through a combination of internal organization and governmental recognition: civil engineers in 1818, architects in 1837, pharmacists in 1841, mechanical engineers in 1847.³ While strictly speaking the word profession could refer to any occupation – Johnson’s dictionary defines it as a “vocation, known employment, calling” – prior to the eighteenth century the professions had generally been limited to the three “learned professions” of medicine,

³ For my understanding of professionalization in the nineteenth century, I’m indebted to two accounts. Magali Larson’s sociological analysis, The Rise of Professionalism (Berkeley: California UP, 1977) is by far the most thorough, although she gives as much attention to America as Britain. Harold Perkin’s Origins of English Society (London: Routledge, 1969) explores the rise of professionalism within the larger context of the Industrial Revolution. See also, W.J. Reader, Professional Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966). Several works of literary criticism also discuss the rise of professionalism. See Lawrence Rothfield, Vital Signs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Alexander Welsh’s George Eliot and Blackmail (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), pp. 33-84, Alan Mintz’s George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), pp. 13-20, James Eli Adams’s Dandies and Desert Saints (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1995), and David Trotter’s Paranoid Modernisms: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

law, or the clergy, with government and military positions making up a complementary subset. The modern notion of the career, in which an individual passes through a series of stages, disciplining and organizing his talents for the sake of a public to which he offers his services in exchange for money and prestige, was largely unknown before the industrial age; what existed instead was a professional class that functioned as a kind of privileged wing of the aristocracy, with the intellectual centers of power at Oxford and Cambridge. Positions were doled out through patronage and nepotism, and inclusion within the professional class was determined by social factors such as birth, property, and family connections. Eighteenth century professions were geared much more towards conferring gentlemanly status on their members rather than training them in a specialized field of expertise – the Latin curriculum of the universities, for instance, was the same for all three professions, the expectation being that after a thorough grounding in the classics a gentleman ought to be able to teach himself how to learn – which meant that there was little emphasis on research or specialization, which had a reputation for being the province of eccentric gentleman “hobbyists” with too much time on their hands.

This latter fact accounts for the great popularity of Menippean satire in the eighteenth century novel, which, to quote Northrop Frye, deals less with people than with mental attitudes: “Pedants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behavior” (119). Because in the eighteenth century specialized occupations hadn’t yet acquired the public respect they would later come to have as a result of the technological advances of the industrial revolution, they were routinely associated with eccentric forms of behavior, which made them convenient material for a novelist on the lookout for an easy satirical target. To this category belong Uncle Toby and his fortifications in Tristram

Shandy, Thwackum and Square in Tom Jones, Squire Thornhill and his disquisition on Aristotle in The Vicar of Wakefield. In the nineteenth century, however, Menippean satire drops off the radar; one might argue that it is present to a limited extent in Dickens's satirical attacks on professional and bureaucratic institutions like Chancery and the Circumlocution Office, and a case could be made that Casaubon is a distant descendent of the type (although in Casaubon's case the satire has become tempered by pity), but generally-speaking the satire of eccentric "hobby-horses" fades into the background in nineteenth century fiction and is replaced by a new concentration, the narrative of the modern career and its attendant search for meaningful work amidst a society that is deeply inimical to authentic forms of calling.

This new focus on the individual calling shares some similarity with a certain romantic ideology stemming from Rousseau and Wordsworth in which the ability of the individual to act independently of others is exaggerated to such an extent that the individual is placed in a position of complete antagonism towards all of society, which becomes a "mass," in the sense of an outside, hostile, unknowable force; faced with this perplexity, the isolated individual must discover how to plot a course in which an elementary level of human dignity can be sustained. This is a very common motif in the literature of the nineteenth century, and one can see it at work in Middlemarch, for instance, where Eliot apotheosizes Dorothea's "hidden life" by comparing it to the life of St. Teresa, or in Mill's view that he who "lets the world choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation" (86). No higher expression of individual self-worth existed among the nineteenth century British middle-class than to become the master of one's own destiny, and yet this same ambition was often accompanied by the fear that by taking a fatal step or being thwarted by society in some way an individual might fail to carry out his specific purpose. In the nineteenth century, society thus comes to stand for the arbitrary forces

in the world that conspire to prevent a uniquely talented individual from achieving his full potential and thereby leaving him in obscurity, which is why, in much of the literature of the period, society is frequently represented as something monstrous, a leviathan that threatens to abolish the unique distinctions between people by crushing their humanity and turning them into cogs in a machine. Although it takes different guises, one can observe the trope of society as a tremendous machine to which is opposed the “organic” qualities of mankind’s creative and imaginative energies across a wide spectrum of Victorian writers, from Thomas Carlyle in the essay “Signs of the Times” – “Men are grown mechanical in head and hearth, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavor, and in natural force, of any kind” (103) – to John Stuart Mill in On Liberty – “Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing” (87) – to Matthew Arnold in Culture and Anarchy – “Faith in machinery...is our besetting danger...as if it had a value in and of itself” (63). Not only did these writers share a common set of metaphors, they shared a common way of seeing: ultimately they feared the threat posed to the individual by the rise of industrial society, and they expressed this fear in figurative terminology that was familiar to them from the writings of an earlier generation of writers and thinkers, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, who first articulated the divide between the creative mind as a source of organic, revolutionary energies, and society as a source of custom and conformity. The later generation of nineteenth century writers saw the problem in much more worldly terms: fusing a secularized version of the Protestant doctrine of work with a Romantic emphasis on the importance of creativity and individual spontaneity, they sought to combat the oppressive effects of industrialization by advancing a definition of the career as a dynamic vehicle of

individual expression, which, at least among the professional classes, exhibited a peculiar combination of non-conformism, originality, and discipline. By choosing a path that would allow him to grow, to develop, to expand, and to cultivate his character in a more meaningful sense, rather than simply performing a routine of some kind, the modern individual was in effect justifying his very existence, shaping his life's plan in much the same way that an artist shapes his masterpiece.

At the root of this change was a horror of automated social behavior, which, as Richard Sennett has argued, was a reaction on the part of the educated professional class to the social evils that attended the rise of industrial capitalism: "The traumas of 19th century capitalism," writes Sennett, "led those who had the means to try to shield themselves in whatever way possible from the shocks of an economic order that neither the victors nor victims understood. Gradually the will to control and shape the public order eroded, and people put more emphasis on protecting themselves from it" (18-19). The industrial revolution brought a tremendous migration of peoples from the British countryside into the factories and warehouses of the cities, a process that tended to raise the suspicion among the professional class who observed it from afar that a fundamentally inimical and even demonic force had been let loose at the root of society itself. The rapid burst of technological development, the cramming of people into factories, the rupture with more communal forms of experience: to the intelligentsia these changes seemed to indicate the presence of an automatic process buried deep in society that was larger than the ability of any single person to control. As Raymond Williams notes in Culture and Society, the new developments brought about a corresponding change in attitude towards society, so that the word "masses" took on a new and somewhat sinister connotation in the political lexicon of the day:

Masses was a new word for mob, and it is a very significant word. It seems probable that three social tendencies joined to confirm its meaning. First, there was the concentration of population in the industrial towns, a physical massing of persons which the great increase in total population accentuated, and which has continued with continuing urbanization. Second, there was the concentration of workers into factories: again, a physical massing, made necessary by machine production; also, a social massing, in the work relations made necessary by the development of large scale collective production. Third, there was the consequent development of an organized and self-organizing working class: a social and political massing. The masses, in practice, have been any of these particular aggregates, and because the tendencies have been interrelated, it has been possible to use the term with a certain unity. And then, on the basis of each tendency, the derived ideas have arisen: from urbanization, the mass meeting; from the factory, in part in relation to the workers, but mainly in relation to the things made, mass-production; from the working class, mass-action. Yet, masses was a new word for mob, and the traditional characteristics of the mob were retained in its significance: gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit. The masses, on this evidence, formed the perpetual threat to culture. Mass-thinking, mass-suggestion, mass-prejudice would threaten to swamp considered individual thinking and feeling. (297-298)

The result of these changes was that “society,” to the literary and professional class that included Mill, Carlyle, and other Victorian writers, took on a much more

expansive meaning than it had had for earlier generations of British writers, especially novelists, for whom society had meant an exclusive circle of genteel members joined by similar networks of class and family. Society, in the novels of Jane Austen, for instance, no matter how restrictive Austen's heroines may find it, has an indelibly human face: it is the outcome of a long tradition of shared behavior, of shared custom, an unspoken agreement that is understood by each of the characters in the novel, and that structures their movements and interactions with one another. Society in the novels of Dickens or George Eliot on the other hand reflects the sociological and economic changes Britain had undergone in being a more nebulous affair, murkier in its outlines. Another way of characterizing this change in perspective is that while for Austen and other earlier eighteenth century novelists, society was always an epistemologically self-contained "knowable community," to borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams, the question for nineteenth century novelists had become whether society could really be knowable at all.⁴ Once again this was a response to underlying changes that resulted from the industrial revolution: it was during this time that there appeared among the literary and professional intelligentsia a mood of what the historian Alfred Kahn has labeled "aristocratic liberalism," a mentality of being under siege, whereby the public intellectual as guide changed uniforms to become the public intellectual as guard, battling heroically to preserve an independent space of culture from the threatening and irrational impulses of a world where day by day it seemed, to once again quote Thomas Carlyle, that "things, if it be not cotton and iron things, are growing disobedient to man" (Past and Present, 11).⁵

⁴For Williams' idea of the "knowable community," see The Country and the City (New York: Oxford UP, 1973), 165-181.

⁵ For "aristocratic liberalism," see Alan S. Kahn, Aristocratic Liberalism: the Social and Political Thought of Jacob Burckhardt, John Stuart Mill, and Alexis de Tocqueville (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), pp. 111-135. Kahn argues that aristocratic liberalism was a fusion of the classic civic ideals of Renaissance humanism with the ideals of modern humanism, successfully combining the Renaissance ideal of positive liberty with the modern ideal of negative liberty and diversity.

From a novelistic standpoint, one can sense this change in perspective in the extent to which the characters in a Jane Austen novel wish to belong “to” society, in a way that Dickens’s and George Eliot’s characters rarely do: in the latter novels society is much more a *problem*, something to be interpreted, contended with, challenged, and overcome. The world described by Victorian novelists was one of an ever-increasing, dizzying range of perspectives, in which the older dramas of love and marriage had become intermeshed with the newer dramas of biology and evolution. In the vast expanses of time and space that opened up to the imagination as a result of the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century, the human actor appeared small and obscure, eclipsed in significance by the mysterious invisible world that appeared through the lens of a microscope. From a scientific standpoint, it was an age of exciting discoveries, but the sinister aspect of it was that human beings no longer seemed to be masters of their own destinies: where once there had been individual action, there were now only automatic processes, where once there had been heroic human undertakings, there was now only brute materialism and machines. In the cultural criticism of the nineteenth century, the latter tended to be derided as “society,” oppressive and dehumanizing, whereas the former was idealized as “culture,” a space of pure autonomy and freedom.

A chief contention of this dissertation is that nineteenth century novelists translated this tension between oppressive society and liberating culture into a narrative structure that framed the upwardly mobile career path as a choice between two divergent conceptions of work, between an altruistic and public-oriented “vocation,” focused on serving the world through a disinterested spiritual calling, and a private and socially respectable “profession,” a line of work that one enters into as a result of social pressures of various kinds, whether these be economic, familial, or otherwise. I trace this dynamic in the novels of Eliot, Dickens, and Hardy, arguing

that while each novelist develops the theme differently, they show enough similarities to identify a struggle not between society and a disembodied space of culture, but between society and the struggle of the individual to discover an authentic version of the self through an achieved vocation, or, put in the more worldly terms of nineteenth century professionalism, through a career, but a career meant as something more than the routine performance of a mechanical task or the simple following of a narrow professionalized track, both of which would be to yield to the dehumanizing pressures of society. This division has something in common with the traditional humanistic dilemma of balancing particular skills with individual “well-roundedness,” but it also involves a political dimension: the vocation holds out a promise of liberation from society, of resolving the “tragic split,” to quote Franco Moretti, that the “modern world has produced between “life” and “profession,”” where, “in the latter field, rationalization and specialization have gone so far that whoever engages in it must accept the biblical sacrifice of his subjective yearnings to its unyielding laws” (217). In other words, the “vocation” is inherently revolutionary in a way that the “profession” is not: unlike the profession, which yields compliantly to the needs of society, the vocation is conceived as an activity of resistance and negation, working towards an imagined future state in which the self will have succeeded in abolishing the mundane pressures of professionalized “rationalization and specialization” that hold the authentic self in check.

To see this conflict in its native form, however, it’s helpful to look not at the novelists but at the critics: a work like On Liberty is a case in point. To the extent that Mill was arguing for individualism as a guiding principle of human affairs, he was relying on standards rooted in Britain’s largely agrarian past, in which property rights had guaranteed the individual’s representation within the body politic, but it was exactly these standards that were being overturned in the nineteenth century by the

explosive rise of industrial capitalism, in which wealth was concentrated in fluid forms of capital rather than land. Rather than mount a systematic critique of the new economic order, however, Mill argued for the recovery and preservation of a set of traditional, “liberal” values in the midst of the collapse of the institutions that had historically supported them. “Culture” in Mill is always portrayed as something superior to mass society, and especially to mass man, with his conformity, emotional excitability, and enslavement to popular opinion, but because it is a culture stripped of its basis in the institutions that have traditionally granted rank and distinction in Britain – that is, land and private property – it has no outward worldly existence and must be sustained by an isolated self, cut off from the support of a stable social order. The only thing this isolated self has to fall back on to satisfy its demand for distinction are individual gifts and talents, and so it’s the admiration of these wherever they appear in any extraordinary measure, now constituted in the figure of the “genius,” that makes up the chief business of culture.

It’s for this reason that Mill’s “autonomous individual” appears so unworldly, his most redeeming gesture an isolated and ultimately futile act of eccentricity. For those who weren’t willing to turn their backs on society there were few other options: Mill’s representation of society, with its emphasis on increased productivity and conformity to the rules of the market, is so overwhelming in its ability to assimilate the unique capacities of the individual that it appears like “a harsh and dreaded censorship,” slowly devouring the creative accumulation of centuries and winding the individual ever more tightly in its grip. The chief problem for Mill is one of resistance, and it’s a problem that he never sufficiently resolves in On Liberty, maintaining throughout the book that curious détente between progressive and conservative lines of thought that is characteristic of his writing in general, especially in the Bentham and Coleridge essays. Mill was an enthusiastic proponent of the doctrine of progress, but he was

troubled by what he saw as the tendency of mass production to promote a damaging conformity of thought and expression by abolishing the capacity to make distinctions, and to the extent that he was aware that the origins of this process were historical in nature, it could be said that he reacting to the same conditions that later in the century would be criticized by Marx. Taking a cue from Tocqueville, Mill saw the problem in terms of a mysterious, forced assimilation, as if society were a silent conspiracy directed against the individual. “The circumstances which surround different classes and individuals, and shape their characters, are daily becoming more assimilated,” writes Mill in On Liberty. “Formerly, different ranks, different neighborhoods, different trades and professions, lived in what might be called different worlds; at present to a great degree the same” (98). Indeed, the dominant mood of On Liberty could be described as a general befuddlement at why these changes were happening at all; at best, Mill can only attribute them to a “powerful agency” operating at all levels of the state, in commerce, in politics, in communications, in education, in public opinion, that threatens to make “Europe, notwithstanding its noble antecedents and professed Christianity...another China” (98). The question of where agency ultimately resides, and especially whether it can still be sought within the realm of individual action, is perhaps the most crucial question On Liberty raises, since what Mill was essentially objecting to was the appearance in society of an institutional “rule by nobody,” an even more arbitrary form of rule than kingship, since no one can petition a ruler that cannot be found. From Mill’s vantage point, the more hostile society became to the interests of the individual, the more mysterious became the source from which this conformity was being generated; one senses a nearly providential cast of mind in his crediting the changes to a “powerful agency,” hidden and ultimately unknowable by any rational standards. At any rate, the best Mill could do to counteract this dreadful pressure was to offer a vague hope that by resisting in

some kind of creative fashion a measure of individual autonomy could be restored, but he left his readers with a dire prognosis for the future: “The demand that all other people shall resemble ourselves grows by what it feeds on. If resistance waits till life is reduced *nearly* to one uniform type, all deviations from that type will come to be considered impious, immoral, even monstrous and contrary to nature” (98-99).

I’ve spent this time discussing On Liberty, because I think it is supremely illustrative of a common theme in nineteenth century literature, namely the sense that in order to preserve a space of freedom the individual must fight back against a hostile and potentially oppressive social arrangement. What was less clear was exactly how this was supposed to be done: for Mill, the concept “society” represented the growth of automatic processes to which the concept “man” was increasingly becoming enslaved, and to articulate the difference between these two concepts Mill relied on metaphors drawn from the artificial and natural realms, metaphors that reflected Britain’s cultural and historical experience of the industrial revolution, which combined anxiety about the future with a nostalgia for a largely imaginary past; metaphors drawn from industrial experience to represent the concept “society,” such as “machine,” “factory,” “steam-engine,” “moulds,” “model,” and metaphors drawn from rural experience to represent the concept “man,” such as “tree,” “flower,” “roots,” “soil,” “river,” as in the following examples from On Liberty:

Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing. (87)

A person whose desires and impulses are his own – are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture – is said to have character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own, has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character. (88)

There is only too great a tendency in the best beliefs and practices to degenerate into the mechanical...Persons of genius, it is true, are and are always likely to be, a small minority; but in order to have them, it is necessary to preserve the soil in which they grow. (91)

Persons of genius...are more individual than other people – less capable, consequently, of fitting themselves, without hurtful compression, into any of the small number of moulds which society provides in order to save its members the trouble of forming their own character...If they are of a strong character, and break their fetters, they become a mark for the society which has not succeeded in reducing them to commonplace, to point out with solemn warning as “wild,” “erratic,” and the like; much as if one should complain of the Niagara river for not flowing smoothly between its banks. (91)

All of these examples are taken from the third chapter of On Liberty, which stands out in a treatise otherwise written in a logical, non-figurative style, and Mill introduces them because he is trying to express a range of complex reactions rooted in the cultural experience of the industrial revolution. The first set of metaphors, linked associatively in the reader’s imagination – “machine,” “model,” “steam-engine,”

“moulds” – carries with it a host of connotations that suggest not only mechanization but various forms of control, the control of material by a machine, of a machine by its operator, of workers in a factory by a supervisor, and finally, of the individual within a fully mechanized and automated society. Mill thus sets up a metaphorical connection between the automatic processes of mechanization that were a result of the industrial revolution and a society that, in the words of Hannah Arendt, “expects from each of its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to ‘normalize’ its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (193). The opposing group of metaphors on the other hand – “tree,” “soil,” “river” -- suggests freedom, mobility, the release of an organic natural energy whose essence is fundamentally creative and restorative, and for which the closest parallel is the cyclical movement of growth in the natural world. What is interesting about Mill in this case is not that he used such metaphors, or even that he associated the former group of metaphors with society and the other with human nature – he was not the only Victorian to do so, and similar formulations can be found in the writings of Carlyle, Arnold, and Ruskin, as well as the major novelists – but that instead of pitting one group of metaphors against the other he fuses them into a strategy for resisting social conformity, whereby the autonomous individual achieves his independence from society by internalizing and combining an active, spontaneous energy with the most rigorous self-control, disciplining and shaping his energies into a “life plan,” a method for making one’s way in the world. Mill’s subject is liberty, and especially the liberty of intellectual thought, but he approaches it from a thoroughly practical angle: throughout On Liberty, Mill is careful to emphasize the dynamic and active over the passive and contemplative, and his choice of language in describing the ideal individual who “chooses his own plan of life for himself” rather than have it shaped for him by external circumstance places the responsibility for

action squarely back on the shoulders of the individual, with its multiple repetition of variations of the verb “to decide.”

He who chooses his plan for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgment to foresee, activity to gather materials for his decision, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decision. And these qualities he requires and exercises exactly in proportion as the part of his conduct which he determines according to his own judgment and feelings is a large one. It is possible that he might be guided in some good path, and kept out of harm's way, without any of these things. But what will be his comparative worth as a human being? It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it. (86-87)

To convey the idea of steady, productive growth over time Mill borrows language from industry and the empirical sciences: “plan,” “employs,” “observation,” “reason,” “judgment,” “materials,” “decision,” “deliberate.” It's a bourgeois vocabulary, attuned to the rationale of a market society and the economic self-interest that drives it, and yet Mill nevertheless directs it to a distinctly disinterested end, namely, to the creation of “worthy human beings,” of men and women of character: “It really is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are.” In other words, Mill employs the language of functionality, of doing and producing, to express the ontology of culture, culture meant not as a body of abstract ideas, but as a lived experiment in which the individual passes through a series of developmental stages towards a final, culminating endpoint.

Approached from this vantage point, culture, for Mill, is synonymous with a notion of vocation, if we mean by vocation not the performance of a narrow, professionalized routine, but the fulfillment of one's total potential in such a way that it proves one's worth as a human being. Culture, for Mill, is far more than simply reading poetry or watching plays: it is the combined influence of these things on the individual's interaction with the world, the way that the individual uses them to shape a complete life, a complete manner of existence. If we follow Mill in associating "culture" with the complete development of an individual life, and "society" with the performance of a habitual and functional routine, the well-known nineteenth-century distinction between "culture" and "society" reflects two divergent notions of the career that appear on the sociological landscape of Victorian Britain, a distinction that is nicely articulated by Nicholas Dames:

Any semantic history of "career" must note the rupture that occurs in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, when a specialized meaning – "career" as a progress through professional employment – begins to supercede the older sense of "career" as a generalized course of life. The word's well-known roots, from the *carraria* or racecourse of late antiquity and the later French *carrière*, develop into the ruts and grooves of industrial and postindustrial labor, as the race of the human life span metamorphoses into the race of mature capitalistic competition. (250-251)

As I hope to show, the tension between these two notions of the career was a central theme in Victorian novelistic representations of work, and here I follow Jennifer's Ruth's contention in Novel Professions that Victorian codes of professionalism

established a dichotomy “between being and doing: a tension between the fact that people discover themselves to *be* suited for a certain line of work (via competitive examination, for example), and the fact that they must also over the course of time *do* that work, and thus come to fulfill the promise of their initial discovery.” (3). Of course, for the mid-Victorian professional the ideal goal was represented in the former, but the risks lay chiefly in the latter: the danger was that society, with its powerful pressures to conform, would force the individual into the narrower, more confining track of mere functional professional behavior. This is what happens to Lydgate, for instance, in Middlemarch: when we first encounter him at the beginning of the novel he envisions a bright future for himself in the medical profession, but by the end he has joined the ranks of “the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocations in a daily course determined for them much in the same way as the tie on their cravats.” Lydgate’s failure stems from his having allowed his vocational desires to become as slight and superficial as the routine pressures of social custom that Eliot represents in the figure of the cravat: by the end of the novel, his “vocation” – the calling to revolutionize the field of medical science – has devolved into a “profession,” a solid practice in which he has gained respect both as a general practitioner and the author of a treatise on gout, but certainly not the future he had envisioned for himself as a young man.

Career Fictions examines this dynamic in the novels of George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and Thomas Hardy, arguing that they all articulated a tension in the lives of their individual characters between a career as a narrative of self-realization and the career as a narrow professional track in which one performs a mechanical and ultimately meaningless function. In my first chapter, “Professional Discourse and Social Alienation in George Eliot’s Middlemarch,” I examine this theme through the lens of the representation of medical discourse in Middlemarch, specifically in relation

to Lydgate. As I mentioned earlier, Lydgate begins the novel with a “vocation,” in the sense that he’s experienced a spiritual calling to create something new in medicine, but he ends with a “profession,” an “excellent practice,” we’re told, but a disappointing fate in comparison to the greatness of his initial vision. Lydgate’s failure to realize his ambitions, I argue, is a result of a breakdown in social communication, whereby he never manages to become more than a “cluster of signs for his neighbors’ false suppositions.” The breakdown is expressed formally in Eliot’s choice of language: by infusing her narrative with discourses drawn from the technical and scientific arenas Eliot distances herself from the “misnaming literatures of the past,” showing that Lydgate’s inability to turn his vocation into a profession results from the fact that he moves in a world where his idiom has become uprooted from a basis in traditional community.

My second chapter, “‘Nature and Accident had Made Me an Author:’ The Idea of Vocation in David Copperfield,” examines the same theme in Dickens’s David Copperfield. In Dickens’ early novels, I argue, it’s common to find small, anarchistic communities that spring up through spontaneous free association between characters, even in the midst of repressive social institutions: for instance, the Pickwickians in the Pickwick Papers, Fagin’s boys in Oliver Twist, the acting troupe in Nicholas Nickleby, to name just a few. While obvious differences exist between these examples, they all feature varieties of unalienated labor that make them seem curiously feudalistic, whether it’s the relationship of Sam Weller to Mr. Pickwick, or the boys to Fagin, or David Copperfield to Steerforth. In this chapter, I focus on one of these communities – the group of boys at Salem House in David Copperfield – arguing that David’s discovery of his role as story-teller at Salem House Dickens develops into a representation of “the vocation” as distinct from the institutional “professionalism” of the newly arisen middle class, which in David Copperfield is

represented both by the deeply impersonal professional world of the Doctors' Commons and the intrusion into the domestic sphere of the nightmarish figure of Mr. Murdstone.

In my third chapter, "'A Nearly Perished Link': Vocation and Profession in Thomas Hardy's Return of the Native", I examine the very different tracks of individual vocational development in the novel's two main male protagonists, Diggory Venn the "reddleman" and Clym Yeobright. Professionalism in Return of the Native is associated with domesticity and thus with the security of village life in the world outside of the heath: the heath itself is associated with risk-taking and political gamesmanship, and thus requires a particular kind of strategic thinking that, I argue, is compatible with the calculation and risk that were associated with the emergence of a new kind of career man in the nineteenth century. While the word "vocation" is used to describe both Diggory Venn's occupation as a "reddleman" and Clym Yeobright's as a preacher, Diggory possesses a quality that Clym lacks, a knowledge of particulars that the novel expresses as a "capacity to handle things." In this chapter, I examine this quality in the context of Diggory's superior practical knowledge: while Clym Yeobright as a preacher longs after transcendent universals and is thus blind to the treacherous realities of the heath, Diggory's craftiness in comparison is simply an extension of his worldly, specialized know-how, his ability to master multiple tasks and apply them successfully to real-life situations of conflict, danger, and rapid change.

Finally, in my concluding chapter, I take a look at the way that professionalization since the nineteenth century has influenced the representation of specialized discourse in the novel. Comparing a recent novel by Ian McKewan, Saturday, with comic novels from the eighteenth century, such as Fielding's Tom Jones, I show how the economic and social pressures of professionalization have encouraged novelists to

spend more time researching specialized subjects and incorporating the technical jargon of these subjects into their narratives for a rhetorical effect that I argue is more “hyper-realist” than realist, since it functions according to a Brechtian kind of alienation.

Over the last few years, a number of studies have been published that focus on professionalism and the novel, and Career Fictions takes its cue from the burgeoning field of scholarship that examines the novel within the context of Victorian professionalism. A growing number of literary critics are borrowing from sociological studies of “professionalization” in the Victorian period to understand the way that the transformation of professions as diverse as medicine, engineering, architecture, and the law during the nineteenth century impacted the form and development of the novel. The range of these studies is wide, from James Eli Adams’s Dandies and Desert Saints, which focuses on the precarious gendering of masculine labor in the Victorian period, to Jonathan Freeman’s Professions of Taste, which places Henry James’s confrontation with British aestheticism in the context of the late nineteenth century’s professionalization of literary life, but what these studies share in common is the recognition that the changing structure of the professions in the nineteenth century had wide-ranging significance for the production of literary texts. My own attempt to trace the tension between the “vocation” and the “profession” in the Victorian novel, between a calling whose primary focus is on individual self-realization and an occupation that is little more than a mechanical routine, is indebted to the same set of sociological and historical works that have contributed to these other studies, especially Harold Perkin’s The Origins of Modern English Society, Magali Larson’s The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis, and W. J. Reader’s Professional Men: The Rise of the Professional Classes in Nineteenth-Century

England, but there are also several literary studies that have been influential on my own thinking, two of which I'd like to single out for special comment.

The first is Ian Watt's The Rise of the Novel. Watt's argument is well-known: the tremendous expansion of the middle-class in the eighteenth century gave rise to the conditions that made the novel possible. In the eighteenth century, the middleclass had more leisure time to devote to reading, and there arose a demand for realistic depictions of characters dealing with the recognizable problems of love, work, and marriage, which in turn produced the mode of formal realism. Watt's thesis has been debated endlessly over the last forty years in a series of books that can be classified in their own scholarly sub-grouping as "rise of the novel" studies – Nancy Armstrong's Desire and Domestic Fiction, Michael McKeon's Origins of the English Novel, Leonard J. Davis's Factual Fictions: the Origins of the English Novel, J. Paul Hunter's Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth Century English Fiction, and Margaret Doody's The True Story of the Novel. While these studies have succeeded in complicating Watt's original thesis in various ways, they all – with the sole exception of Doody's book, which places the origins of the novel in the ancient world – agree with the main tenets of his argument, which is that the rise of the English novel occurred simultaneously with the rise of the English middle-class. In many ways, Watt's book was ahead of its time. Appearing during the heyday of the New Criticism, The Rise of the Novel challenged the critical orthodoxy of the age, which favored close formal readings independent of sociological and historical context. By drawing parallels between the rise of the novel and sociologic and economic developments, Watt laid the groundwork for the New Historicist trends of the seventies and eighties, as well as the studies of Victorian professionalism that have appeared in recent years. What I've taken away from Watt is a certain way of *reading* texts, a method that grounds interpretation in an appreciation of the sociologic and

economic pressures that act on the novel from without and to which (I contend) the novel is a formal response.

The second book is Alan Mintz's George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation. A highly idiosyncratic study that is difficult to place within any particular school of thought – Mintz relies at one point on Foucault for a reading of a section of Middlemarch, but it's the early archaeological Foucault of The Order of Things rather than the much more influential later Foucault of Discipline and Punish – Mintz's book argues that George Eliot promoted what was effectively a new literary program for the English novel: the novel of vocation. In Mintz's view, Eliot's novels reflect the centrality of work in the Victorian era, in which the increasing trends of specialization and professionalization in the nineteenth century had swung the balance of power away from county-dwelling landholders to city-dwelling jobholders. According to Mintz, Middlemarch offers a variation on the German *Bildungsroman*, in which the risks, crises, and anxieties that resulted from this shift are chronicled in the lives of characters on the threshold of adulthood. Whereas in England's past, traditional institutions had been present to ease the choice of one's livelihood, young people in Eliot's novel are faced with the daunting task of choosing a vocation alone in a world of rapid change and increasing uncertainty. The vocation as represented by Eliot, Mintz argues, is thus a means of compensating for an alienating social condition, and the danger Eliot represents, especially in the figures of Lydgate and Causabon, is that one could be led so far astray in pursuit of it that one loses touch with the basic realities of a known community. I rely heavily on Mintz in my chapter on Eliot, and I see my work as building on his insights, especially concerning the antagonistic relationship between the vocation and the community, although as I argue in that chapter I think Mintz could have delved deeper into the issue of language in the novel, how the different scientific and professional vocabularies structure the reader's

perception of Lydgate's vocation. Regardless, George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation has been highly influential on my reading of Middlemarch, and it was Mintz's book that started me thinking about the ways in which the vocation might figure in other Victorian novels.

Several more recent scholarly studies have been useful for my thinking: Bruce Robbins' work, especially Secular Vocations, assisted me in formulating the tension in the Victorian narrative of the career between a liberating "vocation" and the more stringent "profession." The work of Nicholas Dames on Trollope has been useful too, for thinking about the career as an organizing principle in narrative fiction, and Lawrence Rothfield's book Vital Signs helped me to understand the way that nineteenth century novelists deployed professional language to produce formal effects, an insight that was particularly helpful in my chapter on Eliot.

Especially illuminating has been Jennifer Ruth's Novel Professions, which studies the way that the Victorians, in Ruth's words, "conceived professional identity by drawing and then worrying distinctions between ability and effort, intelligence and merit, and being and doing" (3). Ruth's book is also interesting in that she clearly aligns herself with a post-Foucauldian reading of the Victorian novel. As she remarks, critics of her generation inherited a set of profoundly influential Foucauldian studies, such as The Novel and The Police, Desire and Domestic Fiction, Uneven Developments, and The Epistemology of the Closet, that have imposed a burdensome anxiety on subsequent scholarship of the Victorian novel. Ruth wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to these works, but she also wishes to move beyond regurgitations of what James Eli Adams has called "the Foucauldian melodrama: the familiar story of the many-headed Hydra of 'surveillance' violating the sanctity of domestic space" ("Recent Studies in the 19th Century," 858-859). Ruth even goes so far as to speculate whether the entire Foucauldian project was really a response to the

gradual marginalization and increasing powerlessness felt by professional critics of English when faced with the institutional takeover of the university during the eighties and nineties by corporate business practices. When witnessing firsthand the massive devaluation of the profession in the form of the erosion of tenure lines and the appearance of a laboring underclass of adjunct professors, Ruth suggests, it was much easier for critics to theorize the bourgeois individual's conscription within an incarcerating power structure. "However unconscious and mediated the connection," she writes, "it can be no accident that it is precisely when we are experiencing a very real shrinking of our professional autonomy that we come to "realize" that autonomy itself is illusory" (14).

This last observation indicates another important aspect of Ruth's book: it's willingness to offer an analysis of the literature of the nineteenth century within the context of a critical reflection on the current state of literary studies. The anxious status of the Victorian professional, Ruth argues, can be used as a vehicle to explore our own professional anxieties as critics of literature in the 21st century. Vanishing tenure lines and the rise of the adjunct professoriate are problems that are not going to disappear anytime soon, and the next generation of critics will have to take the growing crisis in humanities departments into account by asking questions that go to the heart of what it means to study literature under increasingly hostile economic conditions. If studies like Ruth's are any indication, the question of "what we are doing" as teachers and critics of literature is likely to become even more pressing in an era of budget cuts and slashed endowments, not to mention the administrative demand to justify the service we are providing to students in terms of real-world benefits. In this environment, a more conservative critical approach, one that analyzes the works of the past not to reveal their prejudices or hidden ideological assumptions, but to offer insight into our current state as professional academics, is perhaps welcome, and it's in

this capacity that Ruth's book points the way to the future. As I hope to show, the Victorian novel was interested in negotiating the definition of the career for a generation living in uncertain times, and many of the questions raised by novelists like Eliot and Hardy are the same questions being asked today by academic critics of literature: what is the difference between having a "profession" and a "vocation"? Are they mutually exclusive, or is there a way of negotiating between them? Moreover, into what category does the study, writing, and teaching of literature fall? Should professors of literature try to break through our institutional boundaries to the public at large, or should we turn our backs on the world in favor of more specialized study?

While these are questions that cannot be answered definitively in the following dissertation, they serve as a backdrop to my analysis of the Victorian novel. The novel, because it represents events and actions taking place over a period of time, was uniquely positioned to articulate the worries and concerns that attended the rise of the modern career, not only in being able to show the development of an individual vocation from initial discovery to final fruition, but also by exploring the range of vocational crises that confronted the mid-Victorian professional: the consequences of false starts, poorly-chosen career paths, and the perennial conflict between work and family. As if experimenting or suggesting possibilities for action, the mid-Victorian novel offered its readers different versions of what the career means, different strategies for coping with the obstacles thrown up by an alienating and indifferent society, and it was in the telling of "career stories" that novelists as diverse as Dickens, Eliot, Hardy, and Trollope made sense of the radical uncertainties of the professional period. My intention, then, is to view the representation of the career in the nineteenth century novel in the spirit of Kenneth Burke's insight that literature ought to serve as a kind of "equipment for living," that is, as a strategy for dealing with a particular set of circumstances, much as a literary proverb relates to ordinary

human circumstances.⁶ And it's in this context that one might be able to imagine a criticism that moves beyond the dominant theoretical mode of the Foucauldian era, in which an unsuspecting and uncritical autonomy is revealed to be conscripted within institutional power structures over which it has no control. A keyword of this era has been the *aporia*, those moments of rhetorical or hermeneutical confusion that serve to call into question a naïve reading of a literary text. Returning full circle to the question of the career, and bearing in mind our own anxious careers as teachers of literary texts, it might be well to follow an insight of Bruce Robbins's, who notes that the word *aporia* comes from the Greek *poros*, which means path, passage, or ford; *aporia* is in fact a near synonym of "no way out," but *poros* also means "a stratagem, the expedient which the cunning of an intelligent being can devise in order to escape from an *aporia*" (150). As Robbins points out, *poros* is strongly associated with the skill or craft of specialized workers, belonging to "the entire collection of technical activities represented in the world of men by a wide range of know-how from metallurgy and pottery to weaving and carpentry and including the skills of the charioteer and the pilot" (280). Political in its very definition, and differing from contemplative philosophy in that it eschews universals, *poros* is a practical or professional know-how that concerns moments of risk, like those of the "navigator, the doctor, the athlete, the politician, and the sophist" (Robbins 229). In contrast to the philosopher who gives himself up to an abstract exploration of universals, the professional in his career displays the quality of *poros*, the ingenuity of the specialist,

⁶ Burke contextualizes his discussion of literature as equipment for living within a "sociological" analysis: "What would such sociological categories be like? They would consider works of art, I think, as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye, for purification, propitiation, and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions of one sort or another. Art forms like "tragedy" or "comedy" or "satire" would be treated as *equipments for living*, that size up situations in various ways and in keeping with correspondingly various attitudes," 304. "Literature as Equipment for Living." The Philosophy of Literary Form. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1973) 293-304.

who, by respecting the sheer abundance of particularity in the world, turns his training to political advantage and discovers a measure of self-autonomy in the freedom of his work.

CHAPTER 2
SOCIAL ALIENATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF PROFESSIONALISM IN
GEORGE ELIOT'S MIDDLEMARCH

1.

A quintessential late bloomer as a novelist, George Eliot proceeded in her literary career by troubled fits and starts. Nearly in her forties by the time she made her first casual foray into fiction, her early adult life was plagued by personal difficulties that cast a shadow over whether she would be able to produce work of lasting value. Like Dorothea in Middlemarch, Eliot in her mid-thirties found herself yearning for “something...by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent” (112), but her efforts were frustrated by the social complications resulting from her controversial relationship with Lewes, as well as a Causabon-like inability to produce a work that was compatible with the scope of her vision. Letters from this period of her life all suggest a deep sense of uncertainty about whether she was on the right path, of what the consequences to her intellectual development might be of certain choices she had made, such as abandoning England for Europe with Lewes. Eliot throughout her life seems to have possessed a knack for resolving difficult inner conflicts through strong personal decisions, but she must have been quietly preparing herself for a future of increasing marginalization, in which her expansive talents would go unnoticed. Approaching her thirty-fourth birthday, with the bulk of her work having been devoted to editing, translating, and revising the works of others, she wrote to her friend Sara Hennell that she was more disposed to resignation than she had ever been before: “Let us hope,” she writes, “that we shall both get stronger by the year’s activity – calmer by resignation. I know it may be just the contrary – don’t suspect me

of being a canting optimist. We *may* both find ourselves at the end of the year going faster to the hell of conscious moral and intellectual weakness” (Karl 164).

With the benefit of hindsight, it’s easy to look back on this period as an important stage in Eliot’s development, seeing in the painful experiences of her thirties, for instance, a crucible for the themes of blackmail, gossip, and social alienation that show up later in her fiction, but the truth was that she received very little recognition of her gifts – Lewes, for instance, first encouraged her to try her hand at fiction mainly as a way to pay the bills – and the question of whether she would be successful as an author was a serious one. Her intellectual development throughout her thirties was overshadowed by the dominant male personalities of the circle in which she moved – Lewes, Spencer, Chapman – and her contributions to literature took the form of a kind of high-minded literary journalism – essays, reviews, occasional pieces, and translations, all remarkable in their own way and demonstrating her peculiar capacity for sympathy and insight, but hardly of a stature to earn her the kind of reputation she would later gain as a result of her fiction. If one were to travel back in time to this particular moment in her life, it would have seemed that Lewes, as the author of a popular biography on Goethe, was the more promising talent; the emergence of George Eliot over the next decade or so as the rival of Dickens for title of greatest British novelist is one of the more unlikely stories in literary history and is a testament to Eliot’s resilient combination of stubbornness, discipline, and sheer will power.

But it was the experiences of her thirties that caused Eliot to explore a theme in her later fiction that had tremendous currency among the mid-nineteenth century professional classes: the rise of the career as a structure for organizing and expressing individual aspiration, and the challenges people faced in choosing their vocations in an age of ever-expanding and ever-changing career patterns. The theme of the career touches on nearly every one of the characters in Middlemarch: in Dorothea’s

unfulfilled longing for a spiritual task to which she could devote her full energies and resources; in Lydgate's ambitious plans to combine medical practice with scientific research and his subsequent failure to do either; in Ladislaw's unsettled and vacillating pursuits and his eventual emergence as a career politician; in Causabon's failure to produce anything of merit; in Mr. Brooke's dilettantism and childish irresponsibility in facing up to his duties; in Fred Vincy's doubts about entering the clergy; in Farebrother's amateur naturalism; in Bulstrode's amalgamation of banking and Protestantism; in Caleb Garth's emphasis on "having some pride in your own work and learning to do it well" (606). The career and its attendant anxieties is woven into the very fabric of the novel, lending a particular weight and urgency to the question of choosing the right vocation.

Numerous studies have appeared over the last few years exploring the impact on Victorian fiction of professionalism and the rise of the modern career. George Eliot's relation to this subject was explored at length in Alan Mintz's seminal 1978 study George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation, and so scholars of professionalism and the career have had a tendency to focus on other authors, such as Nicholas Dames's work on Trollope, Mary Poovey's work on Dickens, and Jennifer Ruth's work on Charlotte Bronte. In Novel Professions, for instance, Jennifer Ruth writes that "Alan Mintz's thorough discussion of Middlemarch's portrayal of the rise of the professions saved me from writing a chapter on Eliot while also motivating me to look at novels written when professional identity occupied an earlier stage of manufacture" (7). Mintz's work is certainly thorough and lays the groundwork for much that I will say in this chapter, but he also neglects to account for an important aspect of George Eliot's treatment of professionalism that I would like to address here; namely, the formal dimensions of professionalism, the way that George Eliot uses professional language as a rhetorical tool to communicate the effect of Lydgate's alienation to her readers.

One of the underlying claims of this chapter is that Middlemarch articulates a fundamental tension at the core of the nineteenth century definition of the career, the choice between a “vocation” as an idealized service to humanity and a “profession” as a much more narrow service to society, a tension that I examine through the lens of the representation of medical discourse in Middlemarch, specifically in relation to Lydgate. Lydgate begins the novel with a “vocation,” in the sense that he’s experienced a spiritual calling to create something new in medicine, but he ends with a “profession:” an “excellent practice,” we’re told, but a disappointing fate in comparison to the greatness of his initial vision. Lydgate’s failure to realize his ambitions, I argue, is a result of a breakdown in social communication, whereby he never manages to become more than a “cluster of signs for his neighbors’ false suppositions,” a breakdown that’s expressed formally in the novel in Eliot’s use of professional language: by infusing her narrative with discourses drawn from the technical and scientific arenas, Eliot distances herself from the “misnaming literatures of the past,” showing that Lydgate’s inability to turn his vocation into a profession results from the fact that he moves in a world where his idiom has become uprooted from a traditional community.

2.

George Eliot’s focus on the career is all the more significant, as she was writing during a time that involved a fundamental redefinition of the relationship between the individual and work. The mid-nineteenth century was a period of massive industrial expansion in British society, of increasing professional and economic stratification,⁷ in

⁷ For the following account of professionalization, I’m indebted to two accounts. Magali Larson’s sociological analysis, The Rise of Professionalism (Berkeley: California UP, 1977) is by far the most thorough, although she gives as much attention to America as Britain. Harold Perkins’s Origins of English Society (London: Routledge, 1969) explores the rise of professionalism within the larger context of the Industrial Revolution. See also, W.J. Reader, Professional Men (London: Weidenfeld

which the doctrine of work was beginning to rival the doctrine of religion for centrality in people's lives, and Eliot in her novels and essays positioned herself as the author best equipped to explore the complications arising from the new conditions. Hitherto Britain had been a semi-feudal aristocracy with the majority of the wealth in land, but now it was a modern secular society, with the most of the wealth in accumulated capital. Throughout the nineteenth century, we see a proliferation of new occupations, created to fulfill the technical needs of the industrial revolution; an induction of older occupations into the newer status of "professional;" and a flexibility of social movement between occupations, irrespective of the class divisions of the eighteenth century. What came about as a result of these changes was that older, more traditional idealizations of work – such as the Protestant notion of the calling – mixed and clashed with the newer definitions of work that had arisen as a result of professionalization. In the following essay, I hope to demonstrate the centrality of this conflict in Middlemarch, where Eliot poses the question of whether the achievement of a genuine vocation is still possible in the modern world, or whether the dehumanizing split imposed by modern society between "life" and "profession" has become an institutionalized reality, with the longing for a more "authentic" form of work merely a meaningless ideological fantasy. And a dangerous trap: for it is the desire for such authentic forms of work that leads Dorothea into marrying Causabon, and Lydgate into drastically misreading the local Middlemarch political landscape.

In Middlemarch, great things are heralded by Lydgate's discovery of his vocation. Like the Protestant ascetic, Lydgate receives his call at a young age, and in a moment

and Nicholson, 1966). Several works of literary criticism also discuss the rise of professionalism. See Lawrence Rothfield, Vital Signs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Alexander Welsh's George Eliot and Blackmail (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), pp. 33-84, Alan Mintz's George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), pp. 13-20, James Eli Adams's Dandies and Desert Saints (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1995), and David Trotter's Paranoid Modernisms: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

that suggests a major disruption with both professional tradition and parental authority – Lydgate is “one of the rarer lads who early get a decided bent and make up their minds that there is something particular in life which they would like to do for its own sake, and not because their father did it” (172) – he stumbles across a volume of an old encyclopedia while on vacation from school, which is narrated in one of the novel’s rare flashbacks:

The page he opened on was under the heading of Anatomy, and the first passage that drew his eyes was on the valves of the heart. He was not much acquainted with valves of any sort, but he knew that *valvae* were folding doors, and through this crevice came a sudden light startling him with his first vivid notion of finely adjusted mechanism in the human frame...But the moment of vocation had come, and before he got down from his chair, the world was made new to him by a presentiment of endless processes filling the vast spaces planked out of his sight by that wordy ignorance which he had supposed to be knowledge. (173)

The passage is rich with religious overtones, and would have been especially so for a Victorian audience familiar with the customs and rituals of Protestant evangelism. In The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James describes the experiences of members of Protestant sects who had undergone a religious awakening from God: “Voices are often heard, lights seen, or visions witnessed; automatic motor phenomena occur; and it always seems, after the surrender of the personal will, as if an extraneous higher power had flooded in and taken possession. Moreover, the sense of renovation, safety, cleanness, rightness, can be so marvelous and jubilant as well to warrant one’s

belief in a radically new substantial nature” (224). The parallels with Lydgate’s experience are easy to see: the “sudden light” that “startles” him, the world that has been “made new.” The use of the passive voice in the phrase beginning “through this crevice...” suggests that the experience comes from a source beyond Lydgate’s immediate self, thus imbuing the discovery of his vocation with an otherworldly grandeur, as if the will of destiny were at work, rather than the curiosity of a ten-year-old boy. So powerful is the moment that it seems to contain the seeds of the future, gesturing towards Lydgate’s mature scientific pursuits, not only in the reference to the “endless processes” that fill the spaces of Lydgate’s imagination, but in the conflict between past and present orders of the medical profession that is hinted at in the transition from the Latin word *valvae* to a focus on modern science: “his first vivid notion of finely adjusted mechanism in the human frame.”

But the end of the novel profoundly complicates this moment, since an episode that presaged so much spiritual promise ends in a career in which the protagonist feels himself to be a failure. Secularity wins out over the vestiges of religious experience: at some point during the progression of the novel, the “vocation,” understood as an authentic calling to serve a higher purpose, has been transformed into a “profession,” an “excellent practice,” we are told, in which Lydgate’s skill is in demand “by many paying patients,” but which seems incomplete when measured against the scope of Lydgate’s initial promise: “Lydgate always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do.” Earlier in the novel, the narrator remarks that the world is full of such cases, and that literature has so far done little to represent them:

We are not afraid of telling over and over again how a man comes to fall in love with a woman and be wedded to her, or else be fatally parted from her. Is it due to excess of poetry or of stupidity that we are

never weary of describing what King James called a woman's 'makdom and her fairnesse,' never weary of listening to the twanging of the old Troubadour strings, and are comparatively uninterested in that other kind of 'makdom and fairnesse' which must be wooed with industrious thought and patient renunciation of small desires? In the story of this passion, too, the development varies: sometimes it is the glorious marriage, sometimes frustration and final parting. And not seldom the catastrophe is bound up with the other passion, sung by the Troubadours. For in the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their vocations in a daily course determined for them much in the same way as the tie of their cravats, there is always a good number who once meant to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of their coming to be shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross, is hardly ever told even in their consciousness; for perhaps their ardour in generous unpaid toil cooled as imperceptibly as the ardour of other youthful loves, till one day their earlier self walked like a ghost in its old home and made the new furniture ghastly. Nothing in the world more subtle than the process of their gradual change! In the beginning they inhaled it unknowingly; you and I may have sent some our breath towards infecting them, when we uttered our conforming falsities or drew our silly conclusions: or perhaps it came with the vibrations of a woman's glance. (173)

In George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation, Alan Mintz singles out this passage as revealing a "new program for the novel of the future, the novel of vocation" (56). The passage carries a tone of high moral seriousness, quite different from the playful,

detached commentary that characterizes the description of Ladislaw's varied pursuits. The tone is reinforced by the use of words like "catastrophe," by the metaphorical connection of the vocation to love and marriage, and by Eliot's initial indirection ("that other kind of 'makdom and fairnesse,'" "this passion,"). By the middle of the paragraph, however, it becomes clear that the subject of the passage is the theme of vocation and that "the passion" the narrator refers to is the commitment to a vocation, and moreover, that the narrator has chosen to concentrate her focus not on "the glorious marriage" of a fulfilled vocation, but – in what is a foreshadowing of the fate of Lydgate, and perhaps also Causabon and Farebrother – on the question of vocational failure, which, the narrator insists, is a more appropriate theme for modern literature than the clichéd and superficial love stories characterized figuratively as "the clanging of the old Troubadore strings."

As Mintz suggests, the underlying subtext here is that history has changed in such a way that the traditional focus of story-telling on the themes of love and marriage is insufficient to capture the struggles of men and women making their way in a world in which industry and work have become central realities. Just as she does in the essay "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," in which Eliot criticizes what she refers to as the "mind-and-millenary" species of novels so as to define herself in opposition to it, Eliot here makes an argument about the relevance of certain kinds of literature to the modern world. The theme of work, the narrator insists, is just as dramatic and worthy of our attention as the theme of marriage: it too involves varying degrees of "development," of satisfaction and disappointment. As Mintz writes, "Since the meaning of man's life in modern society has shifted decidedly away from his relation to woman to his relation to the world, literature must now be induced to focus on the experience of work and vocation. The nobility of man's capacity for "generous

unpaid toil,” the promise of this commitment to “alter the world” – these must now become the writer’s true subjects” (55).

But the effort to realize such unalienated labor in the form of a vocation must come at some expense to the individual. Throughout Middlemarch we see this pattern: the vocation is defined as an opportunity for extraordinary risk and self-achievement in opposition to the pragmatic demands of ordinary living, such as making money, being secure, settling down, marrying and having children, none of which presage the sort of excitement and risk-taking that are involved in Lydgate’s view of himself as a “scientific adventurer.” The task of reconciling and negotiating these two forms of value rests squarely on the shoulders of the young people in the novel who are struggling to form their careers, and the drama revolves around the question of whether they can “hold out,” as it were, remain true to their principles in the face of the many pressures mounted against them by society, which, as the above passage suggests, is full of “conforming falsehoods” and “silly conclusions,” of cravats and new furniture, of gossip and pointless trivialities that distract the individual from concentrating on the task and bridging the disorienting gap between what she is capable of achieving and what she will actually achieve – between, to quote Jennifer Ruth in Novel Professions, “the fact that people discover themselves to *be* suited for a certain line of work...and the fact that they must also over the course of time *do* that work, and thus come to fulfill the promise of their initial discovery” (3). A superficial society posing a danger to the discovery of one’s vocation again foreshadows the fate of Lydgate, but it also functions as a statement of faith: according to Middlemarch’s narrator, it is society that is the true enemy of vocation, society that is responsible for making middle-aged men “shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the gross.”

This bias against society as an agent of conformity and “herd-thinking” was common among Victorian writers, but in Eliot’s case it gains an added element of

authority through the use of language drawn from scientific and biological discourse. Silly conclusions aren't simply heard in Middlemarch, they are "inhaled" as part of an "infecting" breath, just as a woman's glance isn't cast, but sends "vibrations," the result of this language, when combined with other words of scientific associations, such as "process," "gradual," "change," is to submerge the individual actor within a much larger hidden underlying realm of biological and natural processes of which the individual actor is scarcely aware: "hardly ever told even in their consciousness." This hidden realm, like society, is a world in which the individual actor becomes eclipsed by functional behavior, and Eliot constantly draws metaphorical connections between them. In Darwin's Plots, Gillian Beer does an excellent job of tracing this language back to its roots in Eliot's reading of Darwin; just as Darwin sought to trace the "variations" made by the pressures of nature in species over time, so Eliot traces the "variations" of domestic life, the ever-so-slight alterations and adjustments that society demands of its members. It's this language that lends to Middlemarch its peculiar texture of clinical specificity, which is why Sidney Colvin, reviewing the novel in the Fortnightly Review, could say that Eliot "had walked between two epochs, upon the confines of two worlds, and has described the old in terms of the new" (356). What Eliot captured in Middlemarch was an age of an ever-increasing, dizzying range of perspectives, in which the older dramas of love and marriage had become intermeshed with the newer dramas of biology and evolution. The scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century, which yielded fields as diverse as geology, evolution, and chemistry, succeeded in conveying to the Victorian imagination the idea that human lives were part of an intricate web of subtle processes that were hidden to the naked eye but were extremely powerful in their ability to bring about change in the natural world. Measured by the rhythms of human life, these subtle processes could hardly be calculated, and yet evidence of their existence could be seen

everywhere in the scientific discoveries of the age: in the evolutionary distance between a fossil and its living descendent, in the building blocks of individual cells that make up a complex organism, in the hidden world that is revealed under the light of a microscope. From a scientific standpoint, it was an age of exciting discoveries, but those discoveries made human beings seem no longer masters of their own destinies: individual choice and action gave way to automatic processes; where once there had been heroic human undertakings, there was now only brute materialism and machines. In the cultural criticism of the nineteenth century, the latter tended to be derided as “society,” oppressive and dehumanizing, whereas the former was idealized as “culture,” a space of pure autonomy and freedom.

A similar formulation can be found in Eliot’s fiction, I suggest, but here the struggle is not between society and a disembodied space of culture, but between society and the struggle of the individual to discover an authentic version of the self through an achieved vocation, or, put in the more worldly terms of nineteenth century professionalism, through a career. But this is a career meant as something more than the routine performance of a mechanical task or the simple following of a narrow professionalized track, both of which would be to yield to the dehumanizing pressures of society. One of the chief characteristics of Eliot’s novels, I’ll argue, is the delineation of two divergent notions of the career: one that corresponds with the word vocation – a spiritual calling that is more focused on individual self-realization – and one that corresponds with the word profession – a line of work that one enters into as a result of social pressures, familial, economic, or otherwise. The characters in Middlemarch must struggle to reconcile the one with the other, but in most cases, they fail, because the aim of the “vocation” clashes with the ethos of the community. This division has something in common with the traditional humanistic dilemma of balancing particular skills with “well-roundedness,” but it also involves a political

dimension: the vocation holds out a promise of liberation from society, of resolving the “tragic split,” to quote Franco Moretti, that the “modern world has produced between “life” and “profession,”” where, “in the latter field, rationalization and specialization have gone so far that whoever engages in it must accept the biblical sacrifice of his subjective yearnings to its unyielding laws” (217).

In other words, “vocation” is inherently revolutionary in a way that “profession” is not: unlike the profession, which yields compliantly to the needs of society, the vocation is conceived as an activity of resistance and negation, working towards an imagined future state in which the self will have succeeded in abolishing the mundane pressures of “rationalization and specialization” that hold the authentic self in check. One can see this dichotomy at work in Lydgate’s character: Lydgate has a profession – it’s his determination to “settle in some provincial town as a general practitioner” (174) – but for Lydgate the profession (general practitioner) is not the important thing; rather, it’s an instrument to fulfill another, more comprehensive goal. According to Lydgate, the primary purpose of his profession is to satisfy his interest in “individual cases,” to keep him in “good warm contact” with his neighbors. As Lydgate patronizingly puts it, there is “nothing like the medical profession” for providing a career that allows one to have “the exclusive scientific life that touches the distance and befriend the old fogies in the parish too” (195). This condescension towards the local and proximate is eventually what traps Lydgate, but it’s indicative of his true feelings. The local is the space where a profession gets worked out through a network of family and personal obligations, but this is far less important to Lydgate than the global ambition to change the face of medical science. Above the daily routines of being a Middlemarch country doctor, there is the higher calling, the vocation that wishes to “pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish,

mania, and crime” (194). Measured against these ambitions, treating the Middlemarch housewives must seem petty indeed, and it’s ultimately not what Lydgate sees as his primary purpose; in fact, the profession, far from being an end in itself, is really a strategic decision to give free reign to Lydgate’s vocational interests: settling in Middlemarch he wishes to avoid having his “vanities provoked by contact with the showy worldly successes of the capital, but to live among people who could hold no rivalry with that pursuit of a great idea which was to be a twin object with the assiduous practice of his profession” (176).

For Lydgate, the “pursuit of a great idea” wins out over “the assiduous practice,” no matter how sympathetic his views of the latter might be. This is in keeping with his education, which takes place in Paris and Edinburgh, both of which were aligned with modern science and therefore clashed with the traditional strongholds of professional power at Oxford and Cambridge, where the gentlemanly ethos that had guided the professions for centuries still reigned. Lydgate represents a newer breed of professional man, rational, independent, cosmopolitan, and he’s hungry to challenge the old order through a series of reforms. His colleagues in Middlemarch view this as arrogance, an unfair attack on the medical creed by a man “who had not been to either of the English universities and enjoyed the absence of anatomical and beside study there” (456), but again this is in keeping with the idiosyncratic nature of Lydgate’s vocational ambition, hostile as it is to the established rules of the profession. As Lydgate explains to Farebrother, he relocates to Middlemarch because he wishes to avoid the narrow confines of professional life in London, with its “intrigues, jealousies, and social truckling, and win celebrity, however slowly, as Jenner had done, by the independent value of his work.” Moreover, the role models Lydgate chooses are not contemporary professional men, but pioneers of early medical history – Jenner, Herschel, Bichat – of whom Lydgate sees himself as the spiritual heir. He

sees himself as a “great discoverer,” a “spirited adventurer,” who was fired with “the possibility that he might work out the proof of an anatomical conception and make a link in the chain of discovery” (175). Lydgate’s goal is not to work within the established medical profession, but to revolutionize it, first, by abolishing the “irrational severance between medical and surgical knowledge in the interest of his own scientific pursuits,” and second, by making discoveries, such as the “primitive tissue,” that will lay the grounds for new medical study. Lydgate wishes to be the founder of an entire scientific order, and it’s the enormity of this ambition that makes his eventual fate as a author of a treatise on gout seem tragic, despite the fact that he’s referred to as having “an excellent practice” – or, in other words, a “profession,” dignified by society’s standards, but insufficient when measured against the promise of his initial calling.

Lydgate’s is merely an exaggerated case of a condition that the other denizens of the novel share, although in varying degrees. The revolutionary implications of achieving one’s vocation can be sensed in the extent to which the characters of Middlemarch feel driven to change the world through their work: among Lydgate, Casaubon, Dorothea, and Will Ladislav, the stakes of individual achievement have been raised to nearly impossible levels. If in the eighteenth century novel, self-worth had meant seeking a well-established position in society, for these characters self-worth involves striking out on one’s own and producing works of momentous value. In a classic Victorian formula, the works determine the quality of the worker, but in Middlemarch the only works that count are those with the potential to alter the course of history. Casaubon’s “Key To All Mythologies,” Lydgate’s search for the primal tissue, Dorothea’s schemes for land-improvements, Mr. Brooke’s run for public office, Ladislav’s programs for political change: the characters of Middlemarch regularly

engage in massive, ambitious projects that at worst go nowhere and at best produce a result that has vastly diminished the scope of the original undertaking.

Over time, this frustration of large ambitions impairs a character's sense of self-worth and ability to function in society. The goal of the vocation, of course, is to make some kind of meaningful impact on the social order, but as the narrator makes clear, the social order is a vast and complex organism, and while its intricacies may appear irrelevant to the seeker after knowledge, it easily rearranges itself to accommodate the odd threat to its stability, just as Middlemarch counts on "swallowing" the unsuspecting Lydgate and "assimilating him very comfortably" (183). The fundamental dramatic irony of the novel is that while the narrator (and the reader) can understand this, the individual characters seldom do, because the vocational desire to turn the world into something else blinds them towards the world as it actually is.

Not every character in the novel experiences this kind of passion for a vocation, but the characters who do all have one thing in common: a lack of secure family structures that prevents them from establishing roots in a traditional community, which means the burden of responsibility for having to make their way in the world is placed squarely on their own shoulders, without the guidance of the proper authorities. Lydgate had been "left an orphan when he was fresh from a public school," and his father, "a military man, had made but little provision for three children;" consequently, when Lydgate asks for a medical education, practicality wins out over tradition: "it seemed easier to his guardians to grant his request by apprenticing him to a country practitioner than to make any objections on the score of family dignity" (172). Ladislav has no immediate family except for Causabon, and it's clear that Causabon doesn't have much influence in deciding what course of life Ladislav ought to take: when Causabon points to his manuscript volumes as an emblem of the benefits of

steady industry, Ladislav replies by “calling himself Pegasus, and every form of prescribed work “harness”” (107). Causabon is isolated intellectually, without the satisfaction of a circle of scholars to give him the kind of support he needs. Dorothea, orphaned since the age of twelve, has been educated on plans at once “narrow and promiscuous,” her uncle “trying in this way to remedy the disadvantages of her orphaned condition” (30). Mr. Brooke is a bachelor and lacks immediate family himself, and as a man of “acquiescent temper, miscellaneous opinions, and uncertain vote” is hardly in a position to act as a guardian to the strong-willed Dorothea, who dissuades him from the need to keep “some middle-aged lady as guide and companion to his nieces.”

Mr. Brooke’s abdication of parental responsibility provokes criticism from Mrs. Cadwallader and the neighboring gentry, who represent the claims of tradition against the whims of a topsy-turvy modern world in which parental authority has broken down and where the relationship between parents and children has been reversed: in each of the above examples it is the young people who demand and the adults who give. It is chiefly owing to the lack of parental limits, the novel suggests, that the desire for a vocation is borne in the hearts of the young people, with their fantastical longings, global ambitions, and exaggerated sense of purpose. From a psychological angle, the vocation compensates for an alienating existence in which there are few established social parameters; unlike a profession, it deals not with people but with spiritual absolutes. Dorothea, for instance, views her marriage to Causabon as a kind of vocational undertaking – she wishes to understand the “freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path” (51) – but this is exactly the problem: her commitment to the idea of becoming a novice under Causabon’s tutelage blinds her to the personal dimensions of the marriage. The difference between Mrs. Cadwallader’s view that “young people should think of their

families in marrying” (80), and the view of Dorothea that “the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you Hebrew, if you wished it” (32) is that the first has considered the social dimension, whereas the second is formed in an individual’s private thoughts and is primarily concerned with the self and its development. The tragedy is that the social order isn’t strong enough to check Dorothea and keep her from acting on what is essentially a private whim. This is Sir James’s reaction when he hears from Mrs. Cadwallader of Dorothea’s impending marriage to Causabon: “Brooke ought not to allow it: he should insist on its being put off till she is of age. She would think better of it then. What is a guardian good for?” (83). As a member of the gentry, Sir James faults a failure in the family structure and insists on a right standard of behavior, but Mrs. Cadwallader recognizes that Dorothea’s decision entails resistance to social norms and thus lies beyond the ability of the community to protect her: forget Dorothea, she tells Sir James, “for this marriage to Causabon is as good as going into a nunnery” (83).

In Middlemarch, the longing for a vocation challenges the standards of the community, since the pursuit of a vocation appeals to standards that are foreign to a community’s understanding. The utopian seeds of the vocation lie in the fact that it projects into the future an ideal state that is absent in the present, and then demands that reality should adjust to meet its expectations. A dichotomy is thus set up in Middlemarch between the universal and the local, the abstract and the particular, that mirrors the dichotomy between the vocation and the profession. In seeking to “alter the world a little” the vocation deals in world-historical terms that far outreach the boundaries of the small Middlemarch community, but the profession doesn’t allow an agent this freedom; rather, it must routinely engage with the mundane world of local social relations that Mrs. Cadwallader inhabits, a world that is “rurally simple, quite free from secrets either foul, dangerous, or otherwise important, and not consciously

affected by the great affairs of the world” (83). Mastery of these complex social relations is crucial to the success of a Middlemarch professional man, whether in medicine, the law, or the clergy; the professional thus develops an adroitness in his personal relations and a knowledge of local custom that tends to be alien to the pursuit of an intellectual vocation. The vocation aspires towards the distant, the universal, the extreme, but the profession is grounded in the concrete phenomena of everyday life. What to Dorothea are the “bands of a narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses, a walled in maze of small paths that led no whither” (51), what to Lydgate are the “hampering threadlike pressures of small social conditions,” with their “frustrating complexity,” are for men like Farebrother and Dr. Wrench the very medium of their daily and professional lives.

The problem is not that Lydgate and Dorothea wish to be completely disengaged from this medium – Dorothea desires “some lofty conception of the world that might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there” (30) and Lydgate dreams of doing “good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world” (178). But there are no institutions that might allow them to gain access to the community in a way that accommodates their vocational longing. Lydgate is viewed as a “jackanapes” by the “well-established practitioners” of Middlemarch (212), and Dorothea, as a woman, can find no positive space outside marriage for her own vocational desires, which appear as eccentric “fads” alongside the more important business of being a wife. This in turn affects their sense of perspective, so that their views of the local community are perverted by their distance from it: Dorothea’s hypocrisy emerges when she remarks that she would have preferred that her new home as a married woman be in “a parish which had a larger share of the world’s misery, so that she might have had more active duties in it” (103), while Lydgate, in conversation with Farebrother, fails to understand that his sentimentalized picture of Middlemarch

as a bucolic retreat from the ills of city life in London obscures the complexities of the town: in the words of Farebrother, it is “not so tame” as Lydgate takes it to be and has its own set of “parties” and “intrigues” (205).

Lydgate’s alienation from the general Middlemarch community – among whom Lydgate has the reputation of being “not altogether a common country doctor,” as well as a “cluster of signs for his neighbor’s false suppositions” (171) – can be glimpsed in his first appearance. At a dinner party thrown at Mr. Brooke’s several Middlemarch wives gossip about the newly arrived doctor:

But we were talking of physic: tell me about this new young surgeon, Mr. Lydgate. I am told he is wonderfully clever: he certainly looks it – a fine brow indeed.’

‘He is a gentleman. I heard him talking to Humphrey. He talks well.’

‘Yes. Mr. Brooke says he is one of the Lydgates of Northumberland, really well connected. One does not expect it in a practitioner of that kind. For my own part, I like a medical man more on a footing with the servants; they are often all the cleverer. I assure you I found poor Hick’s judgment unfailing; I never knew him wrong. He was coarse and butcher-like, but he knew my constitution. It was a loss to me his going off so suddenly. Dear me, what a very animated conversation Miss Brooke seems to be having with Mr. Lydgate!’

‘She is talking cottages and hospitals with him,’ said Mrs. Cadwallader, whose ears and power of interpretation were quick. ‘I believe he is a sort of philanthropist, so Brooke is sure to take him up.’

‘James,’ said Lady Chettam when her son came near, ‘bring Mr. Lydgate and introduce him to me. I want to test him.’ (117-118)

Lydgate arrives in Middlemarch with a clear sense of his own vocational mission, but the Middlemarch wives judge him according to characteristics that to Lydgate could only seem irrelevant to his higher scientific calling. Their perspective is entirely external, aiming to place him correctly in the social order: Mrs. Cadwallader assures the group that he has the accents of a gentleman, while Lady Chettam’s remarks referring to the cleverness of Lydgate’s “fine brow” indicates an interest in phrenology, thus hinting at the existence of competing systems of knowledge among the local Middlemarch community. Moreover, the perspective of the ladies is rooted in the eighteenth century: the wives wish to incorporate Lydgate as quickly as possible into a social hierarchy they comprehend – he’s one of the “Lydgates of Northumberland,” “really well-connected” – but this leads to some ambivalence because his background doesn’t fit with his chosen occupation. Historically at this period surgeons were in the initial stages of becoming organized as a genuine profession and thereby gaining in social prestige, but the Middlemarch wives aren’t aware of this, and a surgeon to them is still the occupation it had been in the eighteenth century, roughly on the same level as a blacksmith or a carpenter, certainly not work befitting a gentleman like Lydgate. This is why Lady Chettam insists that she likes a medical man “on the same footing as the servants,” and why she feels she can condescend to Lydgate by offering to “test him.”

But it’s another clear sign that Lydgate’s intentions have been dramatically misunderstood. The rich subjective intensity of Lydgate’s vocational desire, his longing to effect some kind of radical improvement in the world, demonstrated in those moments later in the novel when the narrator illuminates Lydgate’s interior

thoughts, is hinted here only in the vaguest of fashions, as a slight air of eccentricity: the “animated conversation” he has with Mrs. Brooke, the rumor that he is “a sort of philanthropist.” As the scene continues, it is focalized entirely through the eyes of the Middlemarch wives, contributing further to the sense that Lydgate is removed from the community. Lady Chettam, upon meeting Lydgate, declares herself “delighted,” having “heard of his success in treating fever on a new plan” (118), and we might assume in the following sentence that the narrator has interceded on Lydgate’s behalf:

Mr. Lydgate had the medical accomplishment of looking perfectly grave whatever nonsense was talked to him, and his dark steady eyes gave him impressiveness as a listener. (118)

But the next few sentences confirm that we are still viewing the action from Lady Chettam’s perspective and that “nonsense” could easily refer to Lydgate’s earlier conversation with Dorothea about the cottages:

He was as little as possible like the lamented Hicks, especially in a certain careless refinement about his toilette and utterance. Yet Lady Chettam gathered much confidence in him. He confirmed her view of her own constitution as being peculiar, by admitting that all constitutions might be called peculiar, and he did not deny that hers might be more peculiar than others. He did not approve of a too lowering system, including reckless cupping, nor, on the other hand, of incessant port wine and bark. He said, ‘I think so’ with an air of much deference accompanying the insight of agreement, that she formed the most cordial opinion of him.

‘I am quite pleased with your *protégé*,’ she said to Mr. Brooke before going away.

‘My *protégé*? – dear me! – who is that?’ said Mr. Brooke.

‘This young Lydgate, the new doctor. He seems to me to understand his profession admirably.’

‘Oh Lydgate! He is not my *protégé*, you know; only I knew an uncle of his who sent a letter about him. However, I think he is likely to be first-rate – has studied in Paris, knew Broussais; has ideas, you know – wants to raise the profession.’

‘Lydgate has lots of ideas, quite new, about ventilation and diet, that sort of thing,’ resumed Mr. Brooke, after he had handed out Lady Chettam, and had returned to be civil to a group of Middlemarchers.

‘Hang it, do you think that is quite sound? – upsetting the old treatment, which has made Englishmen what they are?’ said Mr. Standish.

The extent to which Lady Chettam has misjudged Lydgate is obvious in her mistaken assumption that he is Mr. Brooke’s *protégé*; the larger implications of Lydgate’s purpose in coming to Middlemarch – wishing to ‘raise the profession’ – as well as the significance of his European education, are much less important to her than the external signs she reads in Lydgate’s character that she can accommodate to her understanding, his “careless refinement,” his dress, his accent, his cordiality in supporting her opinions and views. But it is these qualities that count as professionally significant in Middlemarch, those small matters of charm and personal charisma that establish trust in interpersonal relations, and to these Lydgate is indifferent. The consequences of this attitude are severe, as the last comment

signifies: bound up with conventional professional attitudes are intense feelings about English culture, feelings that to Lydgate can only seem trivial when compared with the ambitious nature of his calling.

These consequences can be seen in the several instances in which Lydgate clashes with local professional custom. Lydgate relocates to Middlemarch because of his desire for a more independent existence, but he fails to realize that the guiding ethos of professional life in Middlemarch is not independence, but etiquette. Lydgate expects the medical men in Middlemarch to defer to his cosmopolitan ideals and intellectual superiority, but what matters to the Middlemarch professional class are not ideas, but personal loyalties that have been built up over years. As the narrator remarks, in Middlemarch society “it was dangerous to insist on knowledge as a qualification for any salaried office” (187), and yet Lydgate regularly offends his colleagues by contradicting their opinions in the name of the scientific knowledge that he sees as his special calling.

Lydgate’s initial introduction to the Middlemarch professional circle occurs at the Vincys’ dinner table, where he does little to dispel the suspicion of the guests that he has a “certain showiness as to foreign ideas, and a disposition to unsettle what had been settled and forgotten by his elders” (186). Addressing the appointment of a local chaplaincy, Lydgate insists that personal considerations ought to be irrelevant in considering the best candidate for the position:

‘Appointments in general,’ said Lydgate, ‘are apt to be made too much a question of personal liking. The fittest man for a particular post is not always the best fellow or most agreeable. Sometimes, if you wanted to get a reform, your only way would be to pension off the good fellows whom everybody is fond of, and put them out of the question.’ (185).

But this remark doesn't sit well with Lydgate's company, especially Mr. Chichely, the coroner, a "great coursing comrade of Mr. Vincy's" (185):

'Hang your reforms!' said Mr. Chichely. 'There's no greater humbug in the world. You never hear of a reform, but it means some trick to put in new men. I hope you are not one of the *Lancet's* men, Mr. Lydgate – wanting to take the coronership out of the hands of the legal profession: your words appear to point that way. (185)

Chichely's implication is clear: Lydgate's desire for "reform" is really a means by which he might advance himself, "a new man." Middlemarch takes place in 1830s, before the era of the great medical reforms that culminated in the Medical Act of 1858, and being a medical reformer at this time would have been a lonely occupation. The charge that Lydgate is one of "the *Lancet's* men" is a sly attempt to align him with the *Lancet's* editor, Thomas Wakely, a stormy, controversial figure who was forever at war with the medical establishment, thereby placing Lydgate at the most radical fringes of the profession. But the judicious Dr. Sprague intercedes:

"I disapprove of Wakely," interposed Dr. Sprague, 'no man more: he is an ill-intentioned fellow, who would sacrifice the respectability of the profession, which everybody knows depends on the London Colleges, for the sake of getting notoriety for himself. There are men who don't mind about being kicked blue if they can only get talked about. But Wakley is right sometimes,' the Doctor added, judicially. 'I could mention one or two points in which Wakley is in the right.' (186)

Dr. Sprague, sensing an argument and wishing to bring the discussion back to a more reasonable tone, attempts to steer a middle course between the two men. They are after all guests in the mayor's house, and a sense of propriety must be established at the table. Etiquette is more important to Dr. Sprague than truth, and so he plays the role of mediator, the importance of which is understood by the local Middlemarch dinner guests, but which is lost on Lydgate. Dr. Sprague's approach is tactful: he sides squarely with tradition – his assertion that the respectability of the profession, “as everybody knows,” depends on the London Colleges, is a mild rebuke to Lydgate, who was educated in Edinburgh and Paris – but concedes to Lydgate the possibility that Wakely might be right on a few points, thus implying that the medical profession isn't fixed in stone and that there is space in it for new ideas.

Mr. Chichely, sensing a change in emphasis, adopts a more conciliatory manner, and yet he still wishes to confront Lydgate on the subject of the coroner:

‘Oh well,’ said Mr. Chichely, ‘I blame no man for standing up in favour of his own cloth; but, coming to argument, I should like to know how a coroner is to judge of evidence if he has had no legal training?’
(186)

Lydgate's reply:

‘In my opinion,’ said Lydgate, ‘legal training only makes man more incompetent in questions that require knowledge of another kind. People talk about evidence as if it could really be weighed in scales of blind justice. No man can judge what is good evidence on a particular

subject, unless he knows that subject well. A lawyer is no better than an old woman at a *post-mortem* examination. How is he to know the action of a poison? You might as well say that scanning verse will teach you to scan the potato crops.’ (186)

Lydgate’s reply is thoroughly rational and modern in his emphasis on specialized knowledge, and again the underlying assertion is that local custom should give way before matters of scientific principle. But he’s cheerfully oblivious to the effect on his listeners, especially Mr. Chichely, who again becomes personally offended:

“You are aware, I suppose, that it is not the coroner’s business to conduct the *post-mortem*, but only to take the evidence of the medical witness?” said Mr. Chichely, with some scorn.

“Who is often almost as ignorant as the coroner himself,” said Lydgate. ‘Questions of medical jurisprudence ought not to be left to the chance of decent knowledge in a medical witness, and the coroner ought not to be a man who will believe that strychnine will destroy the coats of the stomach if an ignorant practitioner happens to tell him so.’ (187)

Lydgate swept up in the impassioned defense of his ideals, loses sight of the fact that Mr. Chichely “really was the Majesty’s coroner,” and ends innocently with the question, “Don’t you agree with me Dr. Sprague?” (187) To which it is once again left to the diplomacy of Dr. Sprague to smooth things over:

‘To a certain extent – with regard to populous districts, and in the metropolis,’ said the Doctor. ‘But I hope it will be long before this part of the country loses the services of my friend Chichely, even though it might get the best man in our profession to succeed him. I am sure Vincy will agree with me.’ (187)

Dr. Sprague is again put in the position of having to rebuff Lydgate in the interest of defending his acquaintances around the table: no matter how diplomatic the manner in which it is expressed, aligning Lydgate’s views with the “metropolis” and “populous districts” can only serve to make Lydgate seem like more of a stranger in the neighborhood, a man whose cosmopolitan ways are deeply out of touch with local custom, both professional and otherwise. This is reinforced by Mr. Vincy’s reply that he would rather have a “good coursing man” as coroner than someone with medical knowledge, further emphasizing the importance of personal relationships in building professional credibility in Middlemarch.

But Lydgate has no patience with this: “the ignorance of people around here,” he confesses to Dorothea, “is stupendous” (479). Caught up in the glorious undertaking of his vocation, Lydgate is blind to the subtle personal influences at work in Middlemarch, and the result is that by alienating himself he makes himself vulnerable to the machinations of Bulstrode. Taking advantage of Lydgate’s isolated position, Bulstrode values him chiefly because he is a newcomer to Middlemarch, a variation in the complex web of personal exchange that make up the social tapestry of the novel: “one can begin so many things with a new person! – even begin to be a better man” (153). The difference in orientation between the two men appears in Lydgate’s very first conversation with Bulstrode, who in order to appease Lydgate – Bulstrode, the narrator remarks, had a “deferential bending attitude in listening, and an apparently

fixed attentiveness in his eyes which made those persons who thought themselves worth hearing infer that he was seeking the utmost improvement from their discourse” (152) – tells him that he is “fully aware of the backwardness under which medical treatment labours in our provincial districts” (153). Lydgate would appear to have found a sympathetic audience, but when Lydgate goes into detail about his scientific interests, it becomes obvious that Bulstrode’s motive is less disinterested:

‘Yes,’ said Lydgate, ‘with our present medical rules and education, one must be satisfied now and then to meet with a fair practitioner. As to all the higher questions which determine the starting point of a diagnosis – as to the philosophy of medical evidence – any glimmering of these can only come from a scientific culture of which country practitioners have usually no more notion than the man in the moon.’

Mr Bulstrode, bending and looking intently, found the form which Lydgate had given to his agreement not quite suited to his comprehension. Under such circumstances a judicious man changes the topic and enters on ground where his own gifts may be useful.

‘I am aware,’ he said, ‘that the particular bias of medical ability is towards material means. Nevertheless, Mr. Lydgate, I hope we shall not vary in sentiment as to a measure in which you are not likely to be actively concerned, but in which your sympathetic concurrence may be an aid to me. You recognize, I hope, the existence of spiritual interests in your patients?’ (153)

Lydgate tries to strike a common chord with Bulstrode, but Bulstrode sees it as an opportunity to steer the conversation his way. In Lydgate’s comments about medicine

Bulstrode sees evidence of “material means,” which therefore gives him the opening to question Lydgate on spiritual matters. To the finer points of Lydgate’s concerns, however, Bulstrode is entirely ignorant: just as Lydgate is ignorant of the political maneuverings that are going on before his eyes. The tactical language employed by the narrator to describe Bulstrode’s method – “circumstances,” “judicious,” “enters on ground,” “useful” – shows Bulstrode’s superior political skills at dealing with people, foreshadowing the kinds of situations Lydgate will find himself entangled in later in the novel.

Ultimately Lydgate suffers from a political naivety that fails to take stock of the personal rhythms of professional life in Middlemarch. As Alan Mintz notes, “the Middlemarch professional class is not the submissive medium Lydgate imagines it to be but rather a highly charged political field rife with parties and intrigues. Even though the division of men into competing groups sometimes lacks all reason, it is nevertheless inescapable, and any course of action, to be successful, must proceed in the knowledge that it will elicit the favor of one sector and the hostility of others” (90). Measured against his professional colleagues, Lydgate fails to understand the importance of etiquette in determining professional behavior in Middlemarch – etiquette plays a role, for instance, in the controversy between Lydgate and the Middlemarch physicians over the dispensing of drugs, which Lydgate objects to on scientific grounds, but which the physicians view as a kind of gentlemanly obligation and a lucrative source of income. In challenging Lydgate’s position, the physicians see their profession through the lens of propriety, that is, through what does and does not promote good behavior, whereas Lydgate only wishes to institute a practical reform. But the result is that Lydgate, in not caring about etiquette, is uprooted from traditional professional methods in Middlemarch, an impression that’s reinforced by his self-declared status as a scientific adventurer. The allusions to Alexander the

Great in Chapter Fifteen lend an air of world-historical consequence to Lydgate's undertaking – like a conqueror naming new countries, Lydgate plumbs the uncharted depths of medical science – but they succeed in alienating him further from the local, face-to-face patterns of behavior in Middlemarch.

3.

The reason for Lydgate's alienation, the novel suggests, is not the result of rational decision-making, but a product of social convention: the division that emerges from Lydgate's clashes with his professional colleagues is really a clash between two separate kinds of consciousness, a modern scientific consciousness that claims for its authority the pursuit of rational-theoretic knowledge, and a traditional, pre-modern consciousness that claims for its authority the codes and rituals of a local community, the customs, habits, and bonds that arise over time as a result of human living-togetherness. The first kind of consciousness, with its longing to transcend the narrow concerns of the community, is associated with Lydgate's radical vocational longing in Middlemarch, whereas the second kind of consciousness, with its grounding in the local community, is compatible with a parochial kind of professionalism. But Eliot's real genius in Middlemarch is to conceive of this separation chiefly as a problem of *language*. Middlemarch, as mentioned previously, is full of scientific and technical language that tended to intimidate Eliot's first readers, who argued that it lent the novel an air of being overly-analytical. R.S. Hutton, for instance, writing in the Spectator, said of Middlemarch that while it was generally felt that there was "nothing to compare with it appearing at the present moment in the way of English literature," nearly everyone agreed that "there is too much parade of scientific and especially physiological knowledge in it, that there are turns of phrase which are even pedantic,

and that occasionally the bitterness of the commentary on life is almost cynical.”⁸ Sydney Colvin in the Fortnightly Review wondered whether Eliot’s language was apt to read “a little technical and heavy, like a kind of intellectual slang,”⁹ while Henry James, reviewing the novel anonymously in Galaxy, accused Eliot of trying too hard to appeal to a scientific audience, claimed there were a dozen passages in his copy marked “obscure,” and criticized Middlemarch for being “too often an echo of Messrs. Darwin and Huxley.”¹⁰

The language to which readers objected seems innocent enough by today’s standards. In Chapter Fifteen, where Lydgate is introduced, for instance, the following words appear in quick succession over the course of only a few pages: *oxy-hydrogen, galvanic, anatomical, analysis, observation, inference, estimate, inquiry, calculation, cubic, investigation, organism, proof, facts, sequence, demonstrate, experiments, units, statistics, mechanism, circulated, structure, processes, biology, pathology, physiognomies*. Additionally this chapter refers to various scientists – *Bichat, Jenner, Herschel* – and relies on a group of nouns that, while not strictly speaking scientific, tend to become so by association: *web, valves, chain, tissues, bodies, brains*. All of this is woven seamlessly into an otherwise conventional account of Lydgate’s childhood and educational background. One can’t emphasize enough how radically new this language must have seemed to Eliot’s readers. The sense of “organism” as the material structure of an individual animal or plant was less than

⁸ Spectator, June 1872, xlv, 685.

⁹ Fortnightly Review, January 1873, xiii, 145.

¹⁰ Galaxy, March 1873, xv, 424. Not everyone was upset with Eliot’s use of scientific language, however. In an 1877 review of Daniel Deronda, Edward Dowden came to her defense. Just like Dante, Dowden insisted, Eliot was drawing on the full intellectual potential of her age: “Able critics lament over the growth, in George Eliot’s writings, of scientific habits of thought and expression...She has actually employed in a work of fiction such words as ‘dynamic’ and ‘natural selection,’ at which the critic pricks up his delicate ears and shies. If the thorough-bred critic could only be led close up to ‘dynamic,’ he would find that ‘dynamic’ will not bite...Language, the instrument of literary art, is an instrument of ever-extending range, and the truest pedantry, in an age when the air is saturated with scientific thought, would be to reject those accessions to language which are the special gain of the time.” Contemporary Review, February 1877, xxix, 351.

three decades old when Eliot used it in this chapter and had been mostly limited to scientific circles. The same is true of “biology.” “Oxy-hydrogen” entered the language in a technical capacity around 1820, but this was surely the first time it had ever appeared in a novel. The primary definition of “process” dates from the time of Chaucer, but the sense of it Eliot uses here, of an involuntary series of changes or movements occurring on a microscopic level, was virtually unknown before the modern period.¹¹ Readers must have found this sort of language jarring, as if a Gradgrind had suddenly sprung to life and taken over the narrative. As Gillian Beer notes, “the surprise that any modern reader is likely to feel at Hutton’s particular objection should alert us to the degree to which language that has now lost its scientific bearing still bore a freight of controversy and assertion for George Eliot and her first readers” (149).

What is certain is that the passages to which the critics overwhelmingly took offense were those dealing with Lydgate. With a few exceptions, the tone of the rest of the novel doesn’t differ significantly from that of the earlier pastoral novels, but the analytic passages had such an impact on Eliot’s first readers that they were isolated in the imagination and projected onto the character of the novel as a whole. Ultimately the criticism of Eliot’s tone probably owed less to a judgment about artistic design than simple befuddlement at Eliot’s inclusion of language that her readers were unaccustomed to seeing in a novel. What the reviewers of Middlemarch found so puzzling was that George Eliot had inflected the telling of her story with a discourse that had previously never really been given a serious voice in literature. The problem

¹¹ In the Human Condition, Hannah Arendt argues that the recognition of the concept of process in society is coterminous with the rise of the modern age: “Historically, political theorists from the seventeenth- century onward were confronted with a hitherto unheard of process of growing wealth, growing property, growing acquisition. In the attempt to account for this steady growth, their attention was naturally drawn to the phenomenon of progressing process itself, so that...the concept of process became the key term of the new age as well as the sciences, historical and natural, developed by it.” (U of Chicago P, 1958), p. 105

wasn't so much that Eliot was taking a "cynical view" of her characters, as R.S. Hutton put it, but that she was narrating their lives in a manner that couldn't be easily reconciled with any of the traditional English speech communities. The voice that was called to mind by words like "oxy-hydrogen" and "analysis" wasn't that of the gentleman or the rake, the cobbler or the field-hand, but the specialized vocabulary of the scientific lecturer, which the industrial revolution had only recently raised to a new level of prominence in society, and which was therefore associated with more of a technical register than a humanistic, "literary" one. Just as the Middlemarch housewives were aghast at the idea of Lydgate carving up corpses, Eliot's first readers were repelled by the linguistic carving up of an artistic form that had always treated words like "diastole" with either satire or indifference. To the extent that Eliot's readers experienced a conflict, it was between a set of generic expectations rooted in the past, and an influx of analytic language that accentuated the increasing specialization of knowledge.

This explains why for Eliot's first readers a criticism of the novel's language could so easily turn into a criticism of the novel's mood: by infusing her narrative with scientific discourse, Eliot undermines her readers' generic definition of the novel, upsetting the easy dichotomizing between "culture" and "science" as radically opposite spheres. And yet the language contains a specific formal dimension: by exploiting what Bakhtin, in Discourse and the Novel, calls the "*professional* stratification of language, in the broad sense of the term professional: the language of the lawyer, the doctor, the businessman, the politician, the public education teacher and so forth" (1211), Eliot organizes her narrative around discourses that produce distancing effects so as to determine her audience's response to individual characters. Mary McCarthy once noted that Eliot's narrative style evinces its own kind of division of labor, as it shifts now and again from the earnest voice of the narrator to the voice

of Lydgate, Casaubon, or Caleb Garth. In representing the consciousness of a surgeon, scholar, or farmer, Eliot always takes pains to incorporate the language drawn from these particular kinds of work, to show how a character's consciousness has been shaped by them. This is in line with her thinking in the early essay "The Natural History of German Life," where Eliot writes that novelists ought to try to understand work from the perspective of the one who practices it; thus we find that occupational discourses are commonly used by the narrator in Middlemarch to mark differences in character, especially when these discourses happen to be particularly alienating or abstract. For instance, we find in a description of Casaubon that he has taken a wife to "adorn the remaining quadrant of his course, and be a little moon that would cause hardly a calculable perturbation" (120). The trite metaphor of the moon merged with the more abstract terminology – "quadrant," "calculable," "perturbation" – marks Casaubon with a scholarly eccentricity that is the descendent of the Menippean satire one finds in the eighteenth century comic novels of Fielding and Sterne. In a similar sense, the influx of scientific language in Lydgate's sections – "he longed to demonstrate the more intimate relations of living structure and help to define men's thought more accurately after the true order" (178) – shapes our view of Lydgate as someone whose experience has been determined by the artificial conditions of the laboratory, which in turn lends an added irony to his failure to properly estimate the social and political risks that lurk behind the seemingly innocent façade of Middlemarch society. In each case, the language evokes different evaluations, different colors and shades of consciousness, and in this way Eliot weds vocational desire and consciousness at the level of form. Just as we are told by the narrator that Lydgate is a surgeon who intends to do "great work for the world," we see how his passion for his vocation has conditioned his thoughts, determining the way he speaks, interacts, and relates to the world.

In this way, Eliot is extraordinarily sensitive to the ways in which Lydgate's idiom divides him from the Middlemarch community, and she uses this idiomatic estrangement to suggest a broader range of conflicts between Lydgate and Middlemarch. As the novel makes clear, even subtle idiomatic gaps can produce unintended political consequences:

But Lydgate had not been long in the town before there were particulars enough reported of him to breed much more specific expectations and to intensify differences into partisanship; some of the particulars being of that impressive order of which the significance is entirely hidden, like a statistical amount without a standard of comparison, but with a note of exclamation at the end. The cubic feet of oxygen yearly swallowed by a full-grown man – what a shudder they might have created in some Middlemarch circles! ‘Oxygen! nobody knows what that may be – is it any wonder the cholera has got to Dantzic? And yet there are people who say quarantine is no good!’
(483)

A scientific word that seems perfectly innocent to Lydgate's educated consciousness – “oxygen” – can spread fear and alarm among the Middlemarch community, leading to partisanship that then backfires on Lydgate's desire to rally the community behind his building of a new hospital. The language marks Lydgate as a stranger, but it also marks him with a certain level of prestige, and it's the unceasing vacillation between these two points of view that causes disagreement about his intentions among the Middlemarchers.

The Middlemarchers here occupy a position in relation to Lydgate very similar to that of the audience in those extended passages where Eliot represents the interior thoughts of Lydgate's consciousness. Take Chapter Fifteen for instance, where we first learn of the full breadth of Lydgate's vocational passion, and where the narrative is interwoven with language drawn from medical science. The narrative authority established in this chapter depends on the audience's ignorance of the specific content of Lydgate's vocation. The details Eliot includes are the result of careful research on her part – the rise of scientific study within the medical profession, the influence of Bichat on nineteenth century medical circles, the discovery of the microscope – but they could hardly be understood by the average reader. Words like “theorizers,” “anatomical,” “analysis,” and “oxy-hydrogen,” when used to express Lydgate's thoughts, distance Lydgate from the reader while intensifying the impression that we are gaining a privileged glimpse into a subjective experience that is hidden from public view due to its highly specialized nature. Ultimately these words are like the particulars that spread fear among the Middlemarch townspeople: “of that impressive order of which the significance is entirely hidden.” The language in this chapter is principally rhetorical rather than descriptive; it isn't meant to inform, but to produce an effect, to mark “what is authoritative.” Each time the reader's eye juts up against an unfamiliar word – “diastole,” “systole,” “oxy-hydrogen” – the critical sense is dulled to a degree, with the result being a kind of inverse Brechtian effect, in which alienation generates awe instead of independent thinking. Eliot wishes to put her audience in the same position as the provincial citizens of Middlemarch: she wants the reader to feel the disorienting effects of the revelation of Lydgate's vocational desires.

Thus the alienation the reader experiences in confronting the abstract discourses represented in Lydgate's thoughts replicates on a formal level the alienation directed against Lydgate as a stranger in the Middlemarch community. The scientific discourse

in Middlemarch depicts a divided consciousness at odds with its surroundings; from an artistic standpoint, the conflict between an educated, analytic consciousness bent on seeking originality, and the loose repetitive rhythms of a rural tradition, a conflict Eliot herself knew well, is conceived as a breakdown in communication, a problem of *language*. The language also expresses the extent to which Lydgate's vocation has isolated him from any kind of actual community: "He intended to begin in his own case some particular reforms which were quite certainly within his reach, and much less a problem than the demonstrating of an anatomical conception...his detailed study of the of the different tissues, acted necessarily on medical questions...showing new connections and hitherto hidden facts of structure...tissues as ultimate facts in the living organism, marking the limits of anatomical analysis..." (174-175). Here, we are presumably listening to Lydgate not as he might speak to his professional colleagues in the city, since after all, we're told he wishes to keep away from them, nor as he might speak to his neighbors in Middlemarch, since none of them would understand him, but Lydgate as he speaks to himself, alone, in the privacy of his thoughts. We're overhearing an internal conversation between Lydgate and an ideal projection of himself; as mentioned earlier, Lydgate's failure in the end is not a professional failure *per se* – he ends up with a good practice and writes a respected treatise on gout – but the failure is that he never succeeds in discovering a community receptive to Lydgate's private self-conception, a medium in which he might realize it as a public identity. What the scientific language therefore expresses in Middlemarch is the social alienation built into Lydgate's vocational desire; highly idiosyncratic and formed in the isolation of a private subjectivity without the benefit of a community to shape it and grant it legitimacy, Lydgate's vocation never *materializes* anywhere except in the inwardness of his own thoughts.

In order to survive, the vocation must locate a space of community within which it can assume shape and form, but this requires a skill that Lydgate doesn't possess, the skill of politics. It is meaningful, then, that the only character to turn his "vocation" into a "profession" in the novel is Ladislav, who becomes an "ardent public man," "getting at last returned to Parliament by a constituency who paid his expenses" (894), which again seems to draw out the fundamentally political and even revolutionary implications of the vocation as a vehicle through which to alter the world. This seems fitting, since unlike science, which deals in a discourse that is divorced from a common manner of speaking, politics must engage with the world as it actually is; in contrast to Lydgate, Ladislav does engage a community in the form of a constituency through which his deeds can win form and influence in the world, even if this impulse on his part, as the narrator indicates, is slightly naïve. But as Eliot again makes clear, this discovery comes at the expense of the integrity of the vocational impulse itself, for it is only by becoming routinized and professionalized that the vocation can have any impact on the world, and even then the opportunity for change is represented as historically conditioned: "those times when reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has been much checked in our days" (894). In the final equation, Middlemarch expresses a deep skepticism about the ability of the modern individual to achieve an unalienated relationship to his work in the form of a vocation; the pressures of society, the novel suggests, have advanced to such a degree that a tragic split has been inserted between the individual and his work.

CHAPTER 3

“NATURE AND ACCIDENT HAD MADE ME AN AUTHOR”: THE IDEA OF VOCATION IN CHARLES DICKENS’S DAVID COPPERFIELD

1.

George Bernard Shaw once wrote that every profession was a conspiracy against the lay person: among Victorian novelists, no one exemplifies this maxim better than Dickens, who wrote during a period of tremendous transformation in the professions.¹² The professions occupy a special place in Dickens’ novels, and his attitude towards them is ambiguous and complex; on the one hand, he recognized that professional status carried a great deal of respect and that it allowed ordinary members of society to achieve a level of social status that had been mainly limited to the aristocracy in the eighteenth century. For a member of the middle-class, the professions opened up the possibility of becoming a gentleman, a social advantage that Dickens was particularly sympathetic to given the circumstances of his own background. However, Dickens’ opinion of the professions was also greatly influenced by the changing economic and social conditions of the nineteenth century, which created a very different notion of the professional than had been the case in previous centuries, and it is here that one

¹² The Shaw quote is from The Doctor’s Dilemma. (London: Penguin, 1998), 44. For my understanding of professionalization in the nineteenth century, I’m indebted to two accounts. Magali Larson’s sociological analysis, The Rise of Professionalism (Berkeley: California UP, 1977) is by far the most thorough, although she gives as much attention to America as Britain. Harold Perkins’s Origins of English Society (London: Routledge, 1969) explores the rise of professionalism within the larger context of the Industrial Revolution. See also, W.J. Reader, Professional Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966). Several works of literary criticism also discuss the rise of professionalism. See Lawrence Rothfield, Vital Signs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Alexander Welsh’s George Eliot and Blackmail (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), pp. 33-84, Alan Mintz’s George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), pp. 13-20, James Eli Adams’s Dandies and Desert Saints (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1995), and David Trotter’s Paranoid Modernisms: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

can sense Dickens' ambivalence to the professions as a whole.¹³ Throughout the nineteenth century, not only were the professions transformed from a privileged wing of the British aristocracy into a network of exclusive organizations with monopolies over specialized expertise, but they witnessed an enormous expansion in terms of numbers and specialization, as older occupations that had been considered trades in the eighteenth century, such as surgeons and apothecaries, as well as the newer occupations that arose to meet the industrial revolution's increasing demand for technical expertise, such as engineers and architects, were granted professional status through a mixture of internal credentialing mechanisms: the examination, peer-review, and the long-apprenticeship. As Lionel Trilling once noted, Dickens's political sensibility consisted of a "general belief in the rightness of the people and the wrongness of whatever authorities had been put in place to govern them" (167), and his reaction to the social consequences of professionalization could often be highly irreverent. This frequently got him into trouble with his readers, many of whom were of the professional class themselves. Writing in an 1857 article in the Edinburgh Review, for instance, Sir James Fitzjames Stephen criticized Dickens for his lack of "solid acquirements" in his satirical representation of the Circumlocution Office in Little Dorrit, arguing that it was "simply absurd to anyone who understands how the nation's revenue is managed" (37).

As Jonathan Arac points out, many upper-class readers thought Dickens was unrealistic in his portrayals of the specialized fields of activity that were their

¹³ Bruce Robbins picks up on this ambivalence in an intriguing essay on *Bleak House*, where he comments on Richard Cartwright's indecision about what line of work he should enter into: "What is remarkable is not that Richard could feel 'languid' about such professions, but that Esther, hearing all this continues to urge him on. And yet despite all the comedy, Dickens puts the plot solidly behind her. If lawyers, ministers, and politicians are devastating England by faithfully pursuing their callings without asking larger questions about what they ultimately achieve or destroy, the plot also suggests that not having a calling is likely to be fatal, as it is for Richard, and precisely because the individual is then forced to confront the question of ultimate consequences." "Telescopic Philanthropy." Nation and Narration. Ed. Homi Bhaba (London: Routledge, 1990), 213-30.

particular province: “In their reviews,” writes Arac, “the cultivated class of opinion-makers praised Dickens’s revelation of the lives of the poor but questioned the accuracy, validity, and use of his inquiry when it reached into the spheres of business, production, administration, or leisure” (21). While at first glance the extent to which Dickens appears to be out of step with the great technical and social advancements of the nineteenth century is certainly surprising, I would argue that this is owing less to any artistic failing on his part than a conscious aim to represent society from the point of view of an observer who would agree with Captain Cuttle’s statement in Dombey and Son that “it’s so comfortable to sit here and feel “it’s so comfortable to sit here and feel that you might be weighed, measured, magnified, electrified, polarized, played the very devil with: and never know how!” (57) Raymond Williams has argued that the knowable community is a ubiquitous Dickensian ideal, and to the extent that Dickens fails to represent the intricate details of professional life, the answer, I contend, is because the rise of the professions was associated in his mind with the rise of unknowable forms of community.¹⁴ One of the main tenets of this chapter is that Dickens responded to the increasing technical and economic specialization of professionalization by idealizing older forms of community. The nineteenth century was fond of dividing society up into twofold distinctions, such as Spencer’s between military and industrial societies, Durkheim’s between organic and mechanical solidarity, and above all, Tonnies’s between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and it’s tempting to see something similar in Dickens, between the administrative and professional institutions represented by Chancery and the

¹⁴ See Raymond Williams, The Country and the City. (New York: Oxford UP, 1973), 165: “Most novels are in some sense knowable communities. It is part of a traditional method – an underlying stance and approach – that the novelist offers to show people and their relationships in essentially knowable and communicable ways. The full extent of Dickens’s genius can then only be realized when we see that for him, in the experience of the city, so much that was important, and even decisive, could not be simply known or simply communicated, but had as I have said, to be revealed, to be forced into consciousness.”

Circumlocution Office, for instance, and the small, anarchistic communities that crop up in his novels in the unlikeliest of circumstances, throwing misfits and orphans, artists and criminals, into a shared face-to-face compact where the alienating social structures that make up Dickens' bleak view of modern society are replaced by an organizing principle of mutual trust between various members of a group.

Such communities – the schoolboys at Salem House in David Copperfield, the members of the Pickwick Club in the Pickwick Papers, Fagan's boys in Oliver Twist, the acting troupe in Nicholas Nickleby, and Sleary's circus in Hard Times – spring up from below in Dickens' novels, mixing business and pleasure in a curiously feudal setting that is based around a specific type of unalienated labor: pick-pocketing, storytelling, acting, circus-performing. These communities represent an attempt to rescue specialized expertise from its modern debasement as functionalized routine, which Dickens accomplishes by falling back on imaginary, pre-industrial forms of social organization, in which older, enchanted relationships, such as that between a guild and its members, or between a serf and his feudal lord, predominate over their more modern equivalents. As a result, Dickens's novels are full of professionalized “enchanted enclaves,” semi-public terrains that coexist under, alongside, and within the broader power structures of society. If the dominant social ideology of nineteenth-century Britain was the utilitarian doctrine of the “greatest happiness of the greatest number,” which in the name of “professional service” called for every member of society to perform a specific function for the benefit of society as a whole, Dickens imagines in these miniature communities cases where the doctrine falls apart, where the minority for whom the doctrine doesn't apply must band together in a charismatic social compact that hearkens back to a mythical, pre-modern, feudal order.

In this chapter, I'd like to borrow a formulation of Max Weber's to illustrate the way that Dickens in David Copperfield structures the narrative of the nineteenth

century career as an attempt to form a unity between these two separate realms of work, between a charismatic vocation that affirms the primacy of the self in relation to a community and an institutional profession that is dominated by impersonal relations. But first I'd like to take a moment to provide a critical background to the argument I'm making. In Novel Professions, Jennifer Ruth credits two studies in particular for shaping our contemporary understanding of David Copperfield: these are D.A. Miller's "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets" and Mary Poovey's "The Man of Letters-Hero: David Copperfield and the Professional Writer," which Ruth adds have proven so persuasive that George Levine recently admitted that he cannot "think about David Copperfield again without a certain embarrassment at what seems now almost blatant celebration of self-discipline and self-sacrifice in the interest of bourgeois identity and bourgeois ideology" (Levine 53). Of the two, Miller's study has perhaps been the more influential, although both are indebted to a distinctly American style of Foucauldian criticism that views liberalism as a naïve ideology bound to institutional power structures of which liberalism is unaware and that it ignores to its own detriment. Miller's well-known position is that David Copperfield, along with the Victorian novel more generally, has a tendency to endorse the worst aspects of liberal ideology by creating false distinctions between freedom and incarceration, a split that's spelled out quite literally in David Copperfield in the final scene in which David confronts Uriah Heep in prison. By employing the effect of what Miller calls the "carceral" in his novels, Dickens establishes a difference between "a confined, institutional space in which power is violently exercised on collectivized subjects, and...a space of "liberal" society, generally determined as a free, private, and individual domain and practically specified as the family" (59). In the hidden power relations Miller's essay is designed to uncover, these two spaces, seemingly so

separate, are actually symbiotically dependent on each other, despite the best attempts of bourgeois ideology to conceal the fact of their similarity.

Miller doesn't address the professional *per se*, but as Jennifer Ruth notes, the "professional is the hero in the liberal fantasy of individual autonomy, and consequently, the scapegoat in the Foucauldian unmasking of liberalism" (14-15), and Mary Poovey thus picks up on a theme that is suggested only implicitly in Miller's work, the role of the professional as both representative of and contributor to ideological constructions of bourgeois identity in the Victorian novel. Poovey wishes to point out the way that David's idealization of womanhood in the figure of Agnes (and by metonymical association his own mother) is a method for displacing the deleterious effects of having to participate in a modern bourgeois market economy. In Poovey's account, the selfless, altruistic qualities that are celebrated in David's marriage to Agnes and that are grounded in the domestic sphere of the home are an ideological means of checking the competitive spirit of the marketplace, where self-interest and rugged individualism are the norm. Literature serves as a model discipline in this regard, since "literary work was the work par-excellence that denied and exemplified the alienation written into capitalist work" (106), which means that David, as a writer, embodies the contradictions that Poovey identifies as belonging to mid-Victorian conceptions of professionalism. Again, similar to Miller, Poovey's goal is to tease out the complicity and interconnectedness between two realms that are held to be separate in the fictional world of the novel, the angelic realm of domestic conjugal bliss that is personified in the figure of Agnes, and the perverted realm of pure capitalist self-interest that is personified in the Murdstones and other characters in the novel. According to Poovey, the version of nineteenth century professionalism championed by David Copperfield sets out to portray the first realm as an antidotal escape from the second, but Poovey's analysis reveals how they are dependent on each

other in much the same way as the disciplinary system of the prison and the domestic confinement of the home are dependent on each other in Miller's account.

Miller's and Poovey's readings of David Copperfield both contain a "hermeneutics of suspicion," in which a naïve and ideological reading of a literary text is revealed to be complicit with a more sinister agenda. The phrase comes from the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who used it to refer to a tendency among late-twentieth thinkers and philosophers to view the perceived order of reality as conditioned by an underlying force, such as Freud's unconscious, Nietzsche's will to power, or Marx's historical determinism. Of course, each of these philosophers is very different, but they all share a system of thought in which the world of conventional appearances isn't taken at face value, but is attributed to a far more powerful hidden drive, with the result that the naïve confidence with which one has trusted in the world of appearances is called into doubt. Naturally, this world of conventional appearances is the rational, enlightened world of nineteenth century liberalism, which is what introduces the concept of "suspicion" into the equation: to the extent that liberalism serves as the foundation of an entire order of thought, an entire way of structuring reality, it is this foundation and this reality that is called into question, usually by standing philosophical tradition on its head in some fashion, whether by Nietzsche's "revaluation of all values," or Marx's inversion of Hegel. This method of doing philosophy was introduced to American literary criticism first by Freudians and Marxists and later by Foucault, who, as mentioned before, is a powerful guiding force behind Miller's and Poovey's arguments. Such criticism approaches the novel prepared to call into question the entire set of ideological assumptions upon which a traditional, "liberal" interpretation of the novel rests. It sees its job not so much in classifying a set of literary devices, nor in affirming the novel's greatness (or the greatness of its author), but in exposing the hidden calculations and implicit agendas that have been ignored in traditional

readings of the novel. As Jennifer Ruth notes, Poovey's essay is full of language that implies a surface being swept away to unmask an ugly reality beneath: David is "self-serving" (118), "manipulative" (117), and "complicitous" (120), while the novel itself "colludes" (122), "covers over" (123), "distracts" (119), and "disguises" (122). Criticism in the Foucauldian stamp is thus a means of stripping away the surface tensions to reveal a hidden reality that has been papered over by liberalism's self-serving ideology, a form of literary detective work that tries to reveal the hidden crime beneath liberalism's literary cover-up.

The suspicious style can be most hard on authors themselves, who, implicated in the ideological work the critic aims to interrogate, recede into the background where they exercise a nebulous relation to their own texts at the peripheries of intentionality. Miller's and Poovey's essays are too critically sophisticated to attack Dickens directly, but the unspoken assumption is that Dickens the author is just as tangled up in depictions of bourgeois identity as his protagonist is. Thus recent challenges to this style of criticism have often taken the form of an attempt to rescue the author from the critical harm done by what James Eli Adams has called the "the Foucauldian melodrama: the familiar story of the many-headed Hydra of 'surveillance' violating the sanctity of domestic space" ("Recent Studies in the 19th Century," 858-859). For instance, Amanda Anderson, writes about Little Dorrit, "The suspicious approach cannot do justice to Dickens, who...not only critically acknowledges the unholy alliance between British nationalism and global capitalism, but conveys a highly complicated understanding of the gains and losses of detachment cultivated in the service of systematic critique" (66). Moreover, a number of scholars, including Rachel Ablow, Jennifer Ruth, and Matthew Titolo, have argued that Dickens was more aware of the ideological contradictions at work in his novels than has been admitted by critics of the Foucauldian stripe: for instance, Ablow states that "by

contrast with those who have claimed to reveal [David Copperfield's] previously-concealed interpellative effects, I argue that the novel not only calls attention to its disciplinary agenda, it defines it as the principle source of its literary and ethical value" (24), and Matthew Titolo goes so far as to argue that "the typical Dickens's novel grapples with the same power asymmetries analyzed in the typical Michel Foucault essay" (186). In contrast to Poovey, Titolo argues that Dickens' romancing of the professional class contains the seeds of its own critique, so to speak: in his view, the fact that Dickens's idylls of professional autonomy cannot keep at bay the profaning intrusion of economic self-interest should alert us to the possibility that Dickens was more self-conscious of the limits of his liberal idealizations of home, career, and family, as well as the underlying tension between independence and disciplinary structures, than has been commonly held in Dickens' criticism since the 1980s. As Titolo remarks, "David's cynical insights into status and politics threaten to expose the Dickensian romance of independent professionalism as nothing more than a self-serving class-fiction, grafted onto older, more opaque notions of patronage, calling, and service."¹⁵ Seen from this perspective, "the romance of independent professionalism" – to use Titolo's phrase – which hearkens back to feudalistic social organizations is less an effort to resolve institutional anxieties through nostalgia, than a critique of the way that the professions viewed themselves in the nineteenth century. Through satire, that is, Dickens illustrates the ways in which the professional, like the

¹⁵ Matthew Titolo, "The Clerk's Tales: Liberalism, Accountability, and Mimesis in David Copperfield," EIH 70 (2003), 177. Other critics have questioned D.A. Miller's disciplinary reading on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge its own complicity with institutional structures. As Bruce Robbins writes, "the point is that Miller's essay, like my own, comes out of a bureaucratic administrative structure. It is easy but disingenuous, therefore to leave the reader to assume one's unexpressed and unlocated horror before such structures" (Robbins, "Telescopic Philanthropy," Nation and Narration. Ed. Homi Bhaba. [London: Routledge, 1990], 227-228), while Jennifer Ruth wonders whether anxieties about the current professionalization of literary studies have anything to do with Miller's reading: "it can be no accident that it is precisely when we are experiencing a very real shrinking of our professional autonomy that we come to "realize" that autonomy itself is illusory." (Ruth, Novel Professions. [Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006], 14).

“liberal subject” of Miller’s Foucauldian reading, had claimed disinterested freedom that ultimately couldn’t be reconciled with the competing interests of a modern market economy. Titolo aims to reveal how a Foucauldian reading is already implicit in the novel itself: according to him, Dickens articulated a key tension underlying the professions in the nineteenth century, between the semi-autonomy that granted professionals a freedom afforded to few other members of the economy, and the complicity with market-forces that threatened to make professionals no different than other laborers. Dickens was particularly attuned to the ways in which the ideology of professionalism in the nineteenth century – which was generally expressed as an altruistic working for the betterment of society – could come into conflict with more self-interested, calculating forms of behavior.

Titolo’s argument, and other arguments resembling it, represents a significant departure in the criticism of Dickens and the Victorian novel, if only because it offers a reevaluation of the relevance of the author in relation to the text. The late twentieth century shift from a more traditional, “humanistic” literary criticism – the criticism of Lionel Trilling and the New York intellectuals, for example – departed from a focus on the creative imagination of the individual artist to focus on the *text*: the text, in all its rhetorical and linguistic complexity, became the primary object of interest, as well as the primary means through which the older humanistic criticism was challenged. Using a rigorous analysis, a critic could reveal the way that an author’s rhetorical slips contained a whole set of hidden ideological assumptions that reflected the prejudices and conditions of the age in which the author wrote. While this newer criticism shared certain features with the New Criticism of the fifties, a chief difference between the two was in their politics, since the former was part of a trend in literary studies to reevaluate the canon in order to make room for those who had been traditionally excluded, such as women and minority groups. What is clear from these recent

studies on Dickens, however, isn't necessarily that the pendulum has begun to swing back in the other direction, but that critics are rethinking the fundamental relationship between the text and the individual imagination in a way that fuses older critical methodologies: the traditional humanistic idea of the artist as critical commentator on contemporary society has combined with the rigorous historical criticism of the late twentieth century to produce a historically-grounded formalism, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the recent scholarly interest in the Victorian career and the Victorian professional: not only does the example of the career provide a model for narrative fiction by demonstrating, as Nicholas Dames has put it, "the emergence of a discrete form of individual life-plan, a 'making one's own way' that is bound by new imperatives and new difficulties" (247), but narrative itself was used by Victorian writers as a way of creating order out of the disruptive energies unleashed by the spread of professionalism in the early nineteenth century. My own account seeks to build on this effort by showing how the various dichotomies identified in David Copperfield by scholars like Miller and Poovey – between discipline and independence, between impersonal institutions and charismatic self-discovery – are already implicated in the novel at a formal level through the different experiences of work that Dickens incorporates into the story of David's career.

2.

David Copperfield begins with a crisis of inheritance; referring to the prediction by the neighborhood women who assist in his birth that David would be privileged to "see ghosts and spirits" in his lifetime, the narrator recounts that he "will only remark, that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while still a baby, I have not come into

it yet. But I do not complain of being kept out of this property..." (49) This reference to inheritance accomplishes two things; first, in the mention of "ghosts and spirits," it ironically alludes to the imaginative gifts that will eventually aid David in his career as an author, which, when combined with the caul that accompanies his birth, superstitiously suggests that David will lead a charmed life and will ultimately avoid Steerforth's fate. Second, it highlights the fact that David has come into the world without any kind of "real," substantial property, that is, property that is based in something tangible, like money or land. David's father is dead, his eyes having "closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it" (50), and he has received nothing from him in terms of inherited wealth; likewise from his mother, who is portrayed in the novel as a weak and pathetic figure, a "wax doll," "poorly in health," and "very low in spirits" (51). The young David Copperfield appears unworldly; while the events of his birth signal a special destiny of some kind that will distinguish him from the mass of mankind, he is at birth completely separated from the institutions that have traditionally granted rank and distinction in Britain – that is, land and private property – which means that whatever worldly success he achieves in life will have to be sustained by an isolated self, cut off from a stable social order. The only thing this isolated self has to fall back on to satisfy its quest for distinction are individual gifts and talents, and so it's the development of these which accordingly must make up the chief business of David's life, ultimately determining whether David shall "turn out to be the hero" of his own life, or "whether that station will be held by anybody else" (49). Right from the beginning of the novel we therefore see the foundations laid for a distinctly modern narrative, a narrative in which the story of the life and the story of the career are one and the same: unlike the classic protagonists of the eighteenth century novels, David's fate isn't determined by marriage, or his prudence in reconciling his own behavior with tradition, but in setting out upon a

highly unpredictable path in which his “station” is determined not by inheritance but by a combination of ingenuity and circumstance.

The figure of an isolated protagonist making his way in the world without the aid of any kind of community is central not only to the modern conception of the career but also the modern conception of the novel. As historian Burton Bledstein notes, the nineteenth century career entailed a dramatic break with the customs and traditions of the past, witnessing the rise of a “new type of professional man,” who “personally struggled to create his career, he did not inherit it. He rejected the social forms and the public conviviality associated with the shallow intellect of the older learned professions” (177). Calculating, shrewd, competitive, and ambitious, the nineteenth century career-man reflected the enormous changes in work between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, as more traditional, agrarian forms of economic relationship were replaced by the growth of specialization and private industry. While at first glance Dickens might appear not to have as much to do with these matters as other nineteenth century novelists – as George Orwell noted many years ago, despite being able to write about ordinary people Dickens shows very little understanding of the “professions his characters are supposed to follow”¹⁶ – this is less true of a novel like David Copperfield, where one of the novel’s central concerns is to stress the importance of the question David’s aunt presses upon him after he leaves Dr. Strong’s: “For a year or more I had endeavored to find a satisfactory answer to her oft-repeated question, ‘What would I like to be’ (330)? Indeed, the question of what David ought to do with his life is intimately related to the question of whether he will prove to be the hero of his own narrative, and more particularly, what kind of hero he will turn out to be; that the sense of the “heroic” in this context is connected to the question of David’s career should alert us to the degree to which David Copperfield takes its cue

¹⁶ George Orwell. “Charles Dickens.” Complete Essays. (London: Everyman), 166

from the shifting ideologies of nineteenth century professionalism. As Nicholas Dames has noted, the modern conception of the career, in which an individual passes through a series of stages, disciplining and organizing his talents for the sake of a public to which he loans his services in exchange for wealth and respect, provided a prototypical model for narrative in the nineteenth century novel: it was in this context that older categories of value – such as the “heroic” – could be given new life within the modern bourgeois market society of mid-Victorian Britain.¹⁷

As Dames tells it, the new focus on the career in the nineteenth century brought with it a set of new realizations and difficulties; one such difficulty in David Copperfield is the painful self-consciousness that is awoken in David each time he dwells on the question of which profession he ought to enter. The sense of urgency attached to this question is intensified by the fact that David, lacking both experience and guidance, is decidedly ill-equipped to answer it for himself: as he reveals at one point, “I had no particular liking, I could discover, for anything” (330). This isn’t necessarily true, as he does have a liking for literature, but the idea that his enjoyment of literature might be reconciled with the necessity of making a living, or even that making a living might be a pleasurable experience, never occurs to him until quite late in the novel. When it finally does occur to him, the narrator’s use of the word “vocation” to describe his own occupation is striking, especially as it distinguishes him from the professional characters in the novel – such as the lawyers at Doctors’ Commons – who, we suppose, lack the insight to figure out what “nature and accident” had made them:

¹⁷ See Nicholas Dames, “Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition,” Victorian Studies. Winter (2003), 247-258

Having some foundation for believing, by this time, that nature and accident had made me an author, I pursued my vocation with confidence. Without such assurance I should certainly have left it alone, and bestowed my energy on some other endeavor. I should have tried to find out what nature and accident had made me, and to be that, and nothing else. (758)

The view expressed here is a secularized version of the Protestant notion that one has been placed on earth to fulfill a specific purpose and that the way to achieve this purpose is by listening to the dictates of one's own conscience and surrendering the will to the accidents of circumstance.¹⁸ The story of David Copperfield thus becomes, in a very real sense, the story of how David is "called" to become what he is. A primary function of the omniscient narrator is to glance backwards through time and interpret the connections the young David is incapable of making in the moment, connections that nevertheless make sense when considered in relation to the narrative as a whole, as if the entire time some great organizing vision had been operating outside of David's awareness: "I set down this remembrance here," he remarks early in the novel, "because it's an instance to myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life, and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and women; and how some points in the character I shall unconsciously develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this while" (224). Such reflections not only make David's vocation as a writer appear to grow organically and unreflectively out of the experiences of his childhood, but to make his eventual calling

¹⁸ Max Weber defines the calling as follows: "It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists, in particular no matter whether it appears on the surface as a utilization of his personal powers, or only of his material possessions (as capital)." The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London: Routledge, 1992), 19.

not a matter of “choice,” as in the sense of “choosing” to enter into a certain profession, but a force bound to the power of circumstance.

These reflections also serve to distinguish David’s “vocation” from the more properly “professional” occupations represented in the novel, which are characterized by a far less authentic relationship to one’s work as well as to the public for which this work is performed. Although “vocation” and “profession” are often used interchangeably, they are not quite the same, and their distinction had a special relevance in Dickens’s time. Etymologically, the word “vocation,” which comes from the Latin *vocare* meaning “to call,” stems chiefly from the Protestant tradition, where it emphasizes the act of listening, both to the dictates of one’s own conscience and the subtle accidents of fortune through which God’s ordinance is communicated to mortals. A vocation is quite literally something one “is called” to do, by virtue of one’s innate talents and capacities, and it consequently suggests an element of the supernatural, since no one can say for sure where this “call” comes from. The word “profession,” on the other hand, emphasizes the act of speaking, and it’s for the simple fact that words may be either true or false that the verb “to profess” can mean both “to declare, to affirm openly,” and “to make a pretense of, to pretend.” Because this speech is directed at a world that presumably contains others, there’s always the possibility that the speaker will wish to create a certain impression, to falsify reality in some way, which adds to the word “profession” an element of deception that is missing in the word “vocation.” Thus the word “vocation” carries a weight of authenticity – of having a mission and carrying it out, regardless of the pressures to conform – that is lacking in the word “profession.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Bruce Robbins makes this distinction in an essay on Franco Moretti: vocation demands “public-ness and progress,” while “professionalization...means privacy and regress.” (Robbins, Secular Vocations: Intellectuals, Professionalism, Culture. (London: Verso, 1993).

This distinction resembles the one Max Weber makes in his sociological writings between institutional bureaucracy and charismatic authority. According to Weber, charisma and bureaucracy stand at opposite ends of a spectrum that has as its foundation the economic ordering of society. The farther back we look in history, writes Weber, the more we observe that the leaders in times of great political and historical distress were neither “officeholders nor incumbents of an ‘occupation’ in the present sense of the word, that is, men who have acquired expert knowledge and who serve for remuneration” (Economy and Society 245). Rather, the leaders during such periods have been ‘naturally’ charismatic authority figures who were recognized as such owing to their innate talents and abilities, “holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit,” that are “believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody” (EC 245). It’s this concept of charisma that Weber distinguishes from the institutional nature of bureaucracy; in contrast to the latter, charismatic authority knows nothing of “a form or of an ordered procedure of appointment or dismissal,” knows “no regulated career, advancement, salary, or regulated or expert training of the holder of charisma or of his aids,” “no agency of control or appeal, no local bailiwicks or exclusive functional jurisdictions” (EC 245). While bureaucratic organization relies on a regulated income, taxes, and a generally rational ordering of the economic system, charisma rejects as “undignified any pecuniary gain that is methodical and rational,” instead relying for its authority on the special significance that attaches to an extraordinary and zealous leader. Revolutionary in its attitude, welling up spontaneously from a mysterious inner source, charisma makes a break with all traditional and rational norms; its holder “seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission” (EC 246). Deeply personal in its demands, the power of charisma, as Weber notes, is ultimately transitory, and must be made subject to a process of rational discipline and

professional “routinization” if its unique characteristics are to outlast the moment of its birth; this waning of charisma generally “indicates the diminishing importance of individual action,” until we arrive at the condition of full bureaucratic and institutional control.

In his discussion of bureaucracy and charisma, Weber never addresses the subject of the vocation directly, but it is easy to see in his contrast between charismatic individual action and institutional bureaucratic control a relation to the contrast between a charismatic vocation that affirms the primacy of an individual calling and an institutional profession that is dominated by impersonal relations. What I’d like to suggest is that a very similar dichotomy existed in Dickens’ imagination and that Dickens represents this dichotomy in David Copperfield as the polar extremes of David’s career, extremes that David must vacillate between in order to fulfill his goal of discovering an authentic livelihood. At the root of this narrative lies the notion that a vocation is linked to the experience of an authentic form of community – in David’s case, experienced in childhood among the schoolboys at Salem House, of whom Steerforth is the virtuous and charismatic leader – while a profession involves subjugating one’s desires and one’s will within an impersonal institution, thereby producing an automatic and functionalized kind of behavior. Although he doesn’t address the professional directly, J. Hillis Miller’s account of the alienation of a certain kind of Dickens character perfectly evokes the alienated state of the professional characters in David Copperfield. These characters display

a mechanical involvement in the world, an involvement which leaves the inner self of the person untouched and isolated, in a form of alienation. Such characters lose the sense of their own existence. They feel separated from themselves, or feel that their experiences do not

happen to them, but merely to “someone.” A wide gap opens up between the selves who are involved in the world of impersonal institutions, and the selves they really are, and the latter, lacking all contact with the world, dissolve and disappear into a profound inner void. It is a void of which the characters themselves are not even aware. (Charles Dickens: 208)

We find that the behavior of the professionals in David Copperfield cannot be separated from the institutions to which they belong. The school system is inhumane, so Mr. Creakle must be inhumane. The legal profession is obscure, so Mr. Jorkins must be obscure. Individual action is harnessed to the irrational codes of the institution, and where these codes are cruel, ridiculous, or unjust, the individual must be cruel, ridiculous, or unjust in turn.

Nowhere in David Copperfield is this power of the institution demonstrated to greater effect than in the episode in which David confronts Mr. Spenlow and Mr. Jorkins at the Doctors’ Commons. Doctors’ Commons itself is first represented to the reader in a highly idealized fashion; through the lens of David’s innocent perspective, it takes shape as a kind of folksy, neo-feudal idyll, with the alienating realities of nineteenth century professional and administrative life colored over by a veneer of pastoral imagery:

Doctors’ Commons was approached by a little low archway. Before we had taken many paces down the street beyond it, the noise of the city seemed to melt, as if by magic into a softened distance. A few dull courts and narrow ways brought us to the skylighted offices of Spenlow and Jorkins: in the vestibule of which temple, accessible to pilgrims

without the ceremony of knocking, three or four clerks were at work as copyists. (409)

The meditative language – the “melting noise,” the “softened distance,” the “skylighted offices” – as well as the metaphorical connection of the modern clerk with his monastic counterpart, has the effect of creating a little bubble of country amidst the noise and unrest of the city, distracting the reader from the routine labors of the clerks. The pastoral language is projected onto a professional institution notorious for its bureaucratic indifference – the law courts – but Dickens prevents any ugly realities from disturbing the equilibrium of the overall picture. Instead we discover an office scene that to David’s novice eye appears as a large of kind of family:

The languid stillness of the place was only broken by the chirping of this fire and by the voice of the Doctors, who were wandering slowly through a perfect library of evidence, and stopping to put up, from time to time, at little roadside inns of argument on the journey. Altogether, I have never, on any occasion, made one at such a cosey, dose, old-fashioned, time-forgotten, sleepy-headed little family-party in all my life; and I felt it would be quite a soothing opiate to belong to it in any character – except perhaps as a suitor. (413)

Once more the Doctors’ Commons is linked to a fanciful, pre-industrial past, the “little roadside inns of argument on the journey” recalling the pilgrims in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. By folding together a bundle of nostalgic associations, Dickens masks over the alienation of a modern British professional institution, evoking a dream-like scene that threatens to seduce the young David. But the lazy, seductive

atmosphere of Doctors' Commons belies its functional incompetence, hinted at by David's feeling that it would be soothing to belong to the court in any capacity except that for which the court is intended, the phrase "except as a suitor" tagged on as if to prevent David (and the reader) from being lulled too deeply into the court's deceptive inner recesses. The smooth functioning of the court rests on a pre-capitalist fantasy that its employees exist in relation to the court in much the same way that serfs exist in relation to a feudal estate, that is, through bonds that are filial and sympathetic rather than contractual and economic, a fact that becomes all too obvious when David disrupts the fantasy by inquiring about his salary:

"I suppose, sir...that is not the custom here, if an articled clerk were particularly useful, and made himself a perfect master of his profession" – I could not help blushing, this looked so like praising myself – "I suppose it is not the custom, in the later years of his time, to allow him any—"

Mr. Spenlow, by a great effort just lifted his head far enough out of his cravat to shake it, and answered, anticipating the word "salary":

"No, I will not say what consideration I might give to that point myself, Mr. Copperfield, if I were unfettered. Mr. Jorkins is immovable." (411)

The word "salary" carries the force of an obscenity: the mere anticipation of its utterance in the dream-like reaches of the firm's inner sanctum is sufficient to elicit an unusual physical reaction from Mr. Spenlow, who acts as if he were in shock at the prospect of a taboo being violated. As soon as the economic realities underlying the feudalistic fantasy at the court are exposed, the cozy, fraternal order of Doctors'

Commons breaks down, revealing the true capitalist nature of the court's relationships, which far from resembling the bonds of loyalty that link a serf with his lord, or an apprentice with his master, are organized according to a compartmentalized institutional logic that is cut off from the noise and unpredictability of the London street and that absolves all sense of individual responsibility. It's this condition that becomes aligned with a negative connotation of "professionalism" in the novel; we see this most dramatically in David's attempt to receive remuneration in exchange for the cancellation of his articles. Of course, we expect Mr. Spenlow to have some autonomy as David's boss, but through an "irksome incident in his professional life," we're told, he isn't at liberty to consult his own wishes, owing to an obligation to his partner, Mr. Jorkins, "whose place in the business was to keep himself in the background, and be constantly exhibited by name as the most obdurate and ruthless of men" (411). Upon hearing that David wishes to cancel his articles to make up for a thousand pounds his aunt has recently lost, Mr. Spenlow tells David that it isn't a "professional course of proceeding to cancel one's articles for any such reason" and assures him that his partner Mr. Jorkins will certainly object. David brings his request to Mr. Jorkins who objects only because he imagines Mr. Spenlow to be against it:

"Personally, he does not object, sir," said I.

"Oh! Personally!" repeated Mr. Jorkins, in an impatient manner. I assure you there's an objection, Mr. Copperfield. Hopeless! What you wish to be done, can't be done, can't be done. I – I really have got an appointment at the Bank." With that he fairly ran away; and to the best of my knowledge, it was three days before he was seen at the Commons again. (569-570)

David gives up his suit, seeing “with sufficient clearness that there was obduracy somewhere in the firm, and that the recovery of my aunt’s thousand pounds was out of the question” (570). This “obduracy” is nothing other than a functional inability to sympathize at the personal level, just as commitment to the “profession” is used as an excuse for the failure of individual action. From Dickens’s point of view, the problem with the professional middle-class world satirized in the figures of Spewlow and Jorkins is not that it’s a world of rules, but that it’s a world of rules determined without a discernible figure of authority, a far more arbitrary form of rule than kingship, since, as David learns, no one can petition a ruler that can’t be found. The more hostile the pressures of the institution towards individual action, the more mysterious is the source from which these pressures are being generated, until the sole governing force at Doctors’ Commons seems to be an institutional “rule by nobody,” in which atomization and a lack of normal social relationships, accompanied by false modesty and a blind faith in the rules of “the system,” replace the charismatic authority that we find elsewhere in the novel.

In his depiction of Doctors’ Commons, Dickens tapped into one of the great anxieties of nineteenth century professionalism, the fear that the self-autonomy of the professional class was largely illusory and that the professional class itself was founded on a deception, the deception that professionals were free from the market constraints that affected other laborers in society. The nineteenth-century ideal of disinterested service to society had its origins in the rising professional class, and it was gradually extended throughout the nineteenth century to include the industrial classes as well; the doctrine can be glimpsed in the lecturer John Gray’s promise that the aim of Britain’s future would be to “secure to all men the value of their services to society in whatever way they may be given,” and “to respect men in proportion to

their utility in promoting in any shape or way, the happiness of our species.”²⁰ The professional ideal of disinterested service, however, was a doctrine at odds with itself, since the professions weren’t immune from competition in the marketplace. Not only did the presence of the market threaten the dignity of the professional class by suggesting that professionals were no different than other laborers, but it created conflicts between the ideology of professionalism – which in the nineteenth century committed one to work altruistically for the benefit of the whole – and more rational, self-interested forms of behavior. The contradiction portrayed in Dickens’s representation of Doctors’ Commons, between professional romance and economic reality, is thus an indicator of the contradictions at the heart of nineteenth century professionalism itself, a point that is sufficient to at least complicate the arguments of critics like Poovey and Miller who contend that Dickens fails to recognize the complexity of the power structures at work in his representation of professionalism. In David Copperfield, it is not Dickens, but the *professions* that are bound up in nostalgia and falsification, portrayed as a magical pre-industrial fraternity divorced from the rest of society; Dickens’s portrayal serves as a critique of the professions, showing the extent to which they depend on self-deception. This is likewise true of the characterization of Uriah Heep, who, to quote Matthew Titolo, “comprises the most fascinating account of failed professional growth in nineteenth-century British literature: he is the archetypal organization man, the archetypal hypocrite, a synecdoche of class exploitation and a symbol of unaccountable evil” (183). There are several occasions in David Copperfield where Dickens, in drawing attention to Heep’s deceptive practices, puns on the double-meaning of the word “profession.” For instance, after Uriah has usurped Mr. Wickfield’s firm, he asks David in a moment of human weakness why David didn’t take Uriah under his wing. With an inflection

²⁰ Quoted in Harold Perkins, The Origins of English Society. (London: Routledge, 1969), 259.

on the loaded word “profession,” David finally calls Heep’s bluff, challenging the authenticity of his humility: “I am not fond of professions of humility...or professions of anything else” (638). Similarly, in one of novel’s closing chapters, in which David tours a prison only to discover that Uriah Heep is inmate “Number Twenty-Seven,” the narrator several times stresses the negative, deceptive connotations of the word “profession,” this time in reference to the false declarations of the prisoners, who, as Mr. Creakle in his new role as prison magistrate explains to David, are kept in a state of isolation for the wholesome benefits of their own minds. Amongst the prisoners David discovers a “vast amount of profession, varying little in character” from that in the outside world, “varying very little (which I thought exceedingly suspicious), even in words” (923). The narrator reveals, much to his own fascination, that a chief characteristic linking these “professions” among the prisoners is a love of deception: “above all,” he says, “I found that the most professing men were the greatest objects of interest; and that their conceit, their vanity, their love of deception (which many of them possessed to an almost incredible extent, as their histories showed), all prompted to these professions, and were all gratified by them” (923). The rhetorical slippage and double-punning that introduces the negative connotation of the word “profession” in this scene is reinforced by a number of facts. First, there is the fact that the magistrate of the prison is none other than David’s former schoolteacher Mr. Creakle, of whom the narrator says that “there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did...he had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite” (141). Second, the organization of the prison is remarkably similar to the organization of the Doctors’ Commons: both are valued for their compactness, institutional compartmentalization, and adherence to the rules of a “system” – of the prison, Mr. Creakle remarks that it is an “all-governing and universally overriding system” that “put an end to all doubts, and disposed of all

anomalies” (922), while Mr Spenlow praises Doctors’ Commons for its “compactness,” the fact that it is “the most conveniently organized place in the world, “the complete idea of snugness” (448). Both institutions are organized according to a process of bureaucratic atomization that for the sake of convenience and smooth functioning divides and isolates their occupants from one another, like drones in a beehive. And finally, the two worlds are linked by Uriah Heep, the novel’s model caricature of nineteenth century professionalism gone awry, who becomes the sycophantic prisoner Number of Twenty-Seven. His protestations of innocence are skewered by the narrator who, in language that once again links the false “professions” of the prisoners to the real professions of the outside world, says of prisoner Twenty Seven that he “was perfectly consistent and unchanged,” that “what he was then, he had always been,” that the “hypocritical knave was just the subject to make that sort of profession in such a place,” that “he knew its market-value at least as well as he did, in the immediate service it would do him when he was expatriated; in a word, that it was a rotten, hollow, painfully suggestive piece of business altogether” (925).

The combined result of all these linkages is not only to pull together two worlds that were generally held far apart in the Victorian psyche – the carceral realm of the prison and the juridical realm of the courts, to use the language of D.A. Miller in The Novel and the Police – but to suggest a connection to the reader, however implicitly, between the deceptive practices of the professionals at the Doctors’ Commons and the deceptive practices of the “professing men” in the prison. Both adopt a deceptive stance towards the outside world that attempts to preserve a façade of disinterested humility all while being conscious of the “market-value” that can be achieved from an unknowing and unassuming public.

It follows that David's disgust at the "doubleness" of such behavior should eventually lead him to discover the "oneness" of his vocation as an author: not only does his interest in writing form in reaction to the underhanded insincerity of Heep, but also in reaction to his firsthand experience of professional institutions like the Doctors' Commons, of which David says of the lawyers there that "I despised them, to a man. Frozen-out gardeners in the flower beds of the heart, I took a personal offence against them all" (536). For David (as well as Dickens), the personal act of rebellion, together with a desire to serve an imagined spiritual community, characterizes the "vocation," understood in the older Protestant sense as a calling to serve a higher purpose, in contradistinction to the "profession," where the worker voluntarily surrenders his liberty in exchange for economic security and social status. The difference between these two, to return once more to the words of J. Hillis Miller, is the difference between a self "as it really is" and the self "involved in the world of impersonal institutions:" whereas the vocation most expresses the former, the world of the professions incarnates the latter, in David Copperfield serving as a stand-in for a process whereby society had been transformed into a network of compartmentalized functions that divide the individual worker into two contradictory selves, one calculating and self-seeking by necessity, the other bound to a fantasy of disinterestedness that can be sustained only by a tacit adherence to the rules of a system. The difference, for Dickens, is between work that is bureaucratic and rationalized, and work that contributes something to a genuine community; work that is little more than a routine performance of a mechanical function, and work that is the result of authentic mastery and self-discipline; work that traps and isolates the self within larger compartmentalized structures of power, and work that draws out the self's abilities and capacities by inclusion in an association of unique individuals. In Dickens' novels "the professional" occupies a strange place between the two sides of

this conflict – the “good” professionalism of David, for instance, who directs his self-discipline towards an honorable pursuit, is clearly of a different order than the “bad” professionalism of Heep, which by the end of the novel has been criminalized to such a degree that in prison Heep literally does embody the confusion, to paraphrase D.A. Miller once more, between the professional subject and his carceral double.²¹ But Dickens generally veers towards the former definition, with the professions associated with a society that expects from its members a certain kind of behavior, imposing innumerable rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.

David’s effort to discover his proper vocation is thus a reaction to the entire social structure embodied in institutions like the Doctors’ Commons, as well as the financial and social pressures that tempt him to become involved in them. At the root of David’s understanding, however, lies a much earlier experience of work that gives him the confidence to resist the professional conformity of the Doctors’ Commons and to embark on an uncertain career as an author, and it is here that charisma plays a major role in determining David’s sense of his calling. As decisive as the repulsion of Uriah Heep and the lawyers at Doctors’ Commons are in shaping David’s career, the foundation for his eventual role as an author is laid in his early experiences as a schoolboy at Salem House. David’s two experiences of work in adulthood – between his “vocation” as a writer, and his apprenticeship for a “profession” as a lawyer – correspond to exactly two different ideas of community, which again grow directly out of the two different experiences of work that David has in childhood. The first experience occurs among the group of schoolboys at Salem House, which releases David from his terrifying obedience to Mr. Murdstone. The schoolboys form an odd

²¹ As Miller writes, “faced with the abundance of resemblances between the liberal subject and his carceral double, the home and the prison-house, how can we significantly differentiate them?” (Miller, The Novel and the Police. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), 219.

renegade mini-community within the broader institutional structure of Salem House, and it is through his inclusion within this community that David's vocation as a storyteller is first realized, through a series of accidents that suggest the spontaneous flowering of an innate talent. While the professional characters in David Copperfield are portrayed as atomized within a larger structural organization, the schoolboys at Salem House form a tight little social compact, unified against the institutional terror of the school, and it seems important that David's vocation should grow out of a genuine sense of community, however haphazard this community happens to be. Moreover, in contrast to the bureaucratic procedures of the Doctors' Commons, David's introduction to the vocation of storytelling comes about through a series of accidents, the first of which occurs as a result of his enforced isolation: locked in his room and forbidden to see other children by Mr. Murdstone, David requires companionship and chances upon a small collection of books left by his father, and "from that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company" (105). This imaginary assembly of characters prepares him for the real cast of characters he later meets at Salem House, where once again it's an accident of circumstance that makes his talents known to the other schoolchildren, when David happens to mention to Steerforth something about his enthusiasm for books.

"And do you recollect them?" Steerforth said.

"Oh yes," I replied; I had a good memory, and I believed I recollected them very well.

"Then I tell you what, young Copperfield," said Steerforth, "you shall tell 'em to me. I can't get to sleep very early at night, and I

generally wake rather early in the morning. We'll go over 'em one after another. We'll make some regular Arabian nights of it." (144)

In a school carried on by "sheer cruelty," the role of storyteller gives David a special status among the boys, and while the connection to his adult vocation is never spelled out explicitly, it's implied in the narrator's recollection that "whatever I had within me that was romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark" (146); moreover, it's the "consciousness that this accomplishment of mine was bruited about among the boys, and attracted a good deal of notice to me though I was the youngest there" (146) that stimulates David to exertion. The *community* thus draws out his special talents; David is quite literally "called" to his occupation by the needs of the moment. Serving as an ideal kind of micro-public, the schoolboys unconsciously prepare David for the real public he will address as an adult. Ultimately it's the respect he wins from his peers by exploiting talents already in his possession that lays the seeds for David's vocation, rather than the oppressive education he receives at Salem House, which isn't designed to cultivate individual talents, but to force the boys to "improve" into some unspecified function, an extension of the logic of Mr. Murdstone, who tells David that in order to get ahead in the world, "he must change" (206).

The schoolboys at Salem House organize spontaneously into a feudalistic social arrangement based around a charismatic allegiance to the central figure of Steerforth. David frequently speaks of Steerforth as a "patron of mine" (145) – David certainly benefits from his protection while at school – and David himself owns no property, entrusting all the gifts Peggotty sends him to Steerforth to be doled out at regular intervals in exchange for David's storytelling services. David receives a cake and two bottles of wine from Peggotty, for instance, and "this treasure, as in duty bound, I laid

at the feet of Steerforth, begging him to dispense” (145), at which Steerforth explains that the wine “shall be kept to wet your whistle when you are storytelling” (145). David’s relationship to Steerforth thus resembles that of a serf to an aristocratic lord; what cements this relationship is Steerforth’s natural charismatic authority, which, unlike the austere presence of the autocratic Mr. Murdstone, whose authority over David relies on the act of usurping the rightful role of David’s biological father, shines in Steerforth’s “nice voice,” his “fine face,” his “easy manner” and “curling hair,” so that he becomes a “person of great power” in David’s eyes, possessing a nearly supernatural attraction:

There was an ease in his manner – a gay and light manner it was, but not swaggering – which I still believe to have borne a kind of enchantment with it. I still believe him, in virtue of this carriage, his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for aught I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides (which I think a few people possess), to have carried a spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield, and which not many persons could withstand. I could not but see how pleased they were with him, and how they seemed to open their hearts to him in a moment. (157)

Steerforth’s charisma grants him a natural authority over the other schoolboys, and their obedience is entirely voluntary: as David remarks, “I was moved by no selfish motive, nor was I moved by fear of him. I admired and loved him, and his approval was return enough” (145). The feudalistic relationship with Steerforth substitutes for David’s lack of family ties: it’s the accident that grants David the permission to act, the moment that calls forth his natural abilities as a storyteller. Charisma, then, is tied

to the awakening of David's vocation in an especially crucial way: it presages an exchange based not on economic self-interest, or an enforced institutional routine, but on a charismatic, unforced play that occurs beneath the radar of the authorities of Salem House. Moreover, the community of boys provides David with his first sense of a *public*, a group of appreciative independent selves towards which he can direct his gifts and talents as a storyteller.

But the charismatic moment that David discovers at Salem House cannot last. Steerforth, of course, enters the novel during a moment of acute psychical and physical distress, immediately following Mr. Murdstone's usurpation of the rightful role of David's father and the breakup of his nuclear family. Steerforth arrives on the scene just at the precise moment when David is in particular need of some kind of family tie, and his revolutionary charismatic energy thus serves as a substitute for David's lack of a father. Steerforth – as well as the other schoolboys at Salem House – thus stands in for David's genuine family, but the charismatic, semi-feudal relations we see between them can only be achieved on a temporary basis: as the novel progresses, and David enters into professional life, we see charisma being denigrated either into a strategy for getting ahead – Heep's "humility" – or a set, institutional routine – Mr. Jorkins' "professional proceeding."

This is fitting, as the Salem House episode in David Copperfield is immediately followed by David's second and much less positive childhood experience of work, where charisma plays no part at all, overwhelmed as it is by the raw brutal facts of capitalistic exploitation: the episode in the blacking factory, which couldn't be more different than the raucous, good-humored anarchism of Salem House, and which Mr. Murdstone presents to David as a rigorous exercise in character-building: "what is before you," he tells him, "is a fight with the world; and the sooner you begin it, the better" (207). Coming as it does right after the scene at Salem House, it serves to

highlight the striking difference between the two environments. Like Marx's silkworm, which spins silk not to become a butterfly but to maintain its existence as a silkworm, David is told that he will "earn enough for himself to provide for his eating and drinking, and pocket-money" (207), while David's lodging and clothes are to be paid by Mr. Murdstone. This leaves David no durable personal property, no space he can truly call his own: cleverly, Dickens links this condition to both colonialism and a vast network of global capital, since Murdstone and Grinby's trade involves "voyages both the East and West Indies" (209). As David indicates, the work is non-specialized and repetitive, reduced to the routine performance of a few mechanical tasks, a fact that astonishes the narrator as he looks back on this period of his life: "A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby" (208). Each of these qualities – strong powers of observation, quickness, eagerness, delicateness, mental and physical sensitivity – are qualities that were permitted to shine under the charismatic influence of Steerforth, but in the blacking factory they wallow in isolated negligence:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associations with those of my happier childhood – not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and

delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. (210)

The importance of a community of peers in shaping David's sense of vocation – “growing up to be a learned and important man” – cannot be overemphasized, because, as I mentioned earlier, it provides David with his first sense of a public, but what is perhaps even more important is that David here experiences exploitation to a degree that wasn't possible at Salem House, since his relations with Steerforth and the rest of the boys were largely free of economic factors. Work thus takes two forms in David's childhood imagination, the first being the work he experiences among the group of boys at Salem House, which carries a bundle of associations – free, voluntary, creative, charismatic, feudalistic, and independent of material conditions – while the second is the work he experiences in the blacking factory, which carries an opposing set of associations – slavish, exploitative, routine, shameful, and isolating. These two imaginary conceptions of work from childhood become a means for interpreting and understanding the work that David encounters in adulthood, with a dialectic developing between a free, disinterested form of work that David eventually identifies with having a “vocation,” and a much more rational, calculating, and ultimately inauthentic form of work that is associated with the “professing” behaviors of Heep and the lawyers from the Doctors Commons.

The two figures from David's childhood who best embody these two different types of work are Steerforth and Mr. Murdstone, both of whom have a significant influence on the formation of David's character, the first by encouraging him to put his artistic gifts to good use at Salem House, the second through familiarizing him with the sphere of economic production in the blacking factory. Of course, as a

merchant, Mr. Murdstone isn't a professional *per se*, but he is aligned with the professional class through his dealings with Doctors' Commons: to his astonishment, David finds Mr. Murdstone in the company of Mr. Spenlow, who remarks, "Ah Copperfield, you know this gentleman, I believe?" (537). David replies by offering Mr. Murdstone a cold bow, and later, in a corner of the office, he gets the chance to speak to Mr. Murdstone alone, who tells David that there is "an antipathy" between them:

'It rankled in your baby breast,' he said. 'It embittered the life of your poor mother. You are right. I hope you may do better yet; I hope you may correct yourself.'

Here he ended the dialogue, which had been carried on in a low voice, in a corner of the outer office, by passing into Mr. Spenlow's room, and saying aloud, in his smoothest manner:

'Gentlemen of Mr. Spenlow's profession are accustomed to family differences and know how complicated and difficult they always are!' With that, he paid the money for his license; and receiving it neatly folded from Mr. Spenlow, together with a shake of the hand, and a polite wish for his happiness and the lady's went out of the office. (538)

This scene not only reminds us of Mr. Murdstone's hypocrisy, his tendency to act one way around David and then another when he's in public, but shows the tight connection between Mr. Murdstone and "gentlemen of Mr. Spenlow's profession." The Doctors' Commons, this scene reminds us, depends financially on the type of exploitation that David himself experienced in the blacking factory. Even if he can't

be considered a professional himself, Mr. Murdstone stands for the exploitative system that sustains the professions economically.

David's experience in the blacking factory confirms in him the belief that the charismatic relations he discovered among the schoolboys in Salem House are fragile and temporary, set adrift in a world of misery and exploitation. David learns that the spontaneous charismatic outpouring of energy that accompanies the discovery of his vocation can only be achieved fitfully, and David eventually realizes that in attempting to institutionalize this charisma the professions unwittingly destroy it. So absent is charisma from the professional spaces of the novels that it almost suggests a silent conspiracy on the part of the professions to eliminate charisma as a guiding force in human affairs, and much of the novel thus becomes a yearning on David's part for a lost original moment in which the revolutionary presence of charisma allowed David to "appear" as he really was, rather than involve himself in the world of impersonal institutions represented by the likes of Doctors Commons and the other professional spaces in the novel. Charisma is therefore tied to David's discovery of his vocation because, as Weber notes, it is the "specific creative revolutionary force in history,"²² unlike professional structures, which exchange charisma for a set of economically viable routines, charisma carries a political force. Dickens was generally uninterested in politics – as a court reporter, Dickens had seen a great deal of Parliament and had carried away a contemptuous opinion of it that never changed until the end of his life – but it would be untrue to call Dickens an apolitical writer. Indeed, the small anarchistic communities that spring up throughout his novels, exemplified by the community of schoolboys at Salem House, seem like elements of a philosophy of the state of nature, although it is true that the content of this thought is expressed in a form and vocabulary that lies outside the traditional discourse of political philosophy. The

²² *Ibid.* 1117

state of nature, as expressed from Hobbes to Rousseau, was never meant to represent an original historical moment from which mankind had deviated, but was on the contrary an attempt to imagine what man's condition would be if stripped of the stabilizing influence of society, in Hobbes resulting in a violent war of all against all, in Rousseau a blissful state of childlike innocence. In Dickens, this might take the form of a return of "charismatic" relations, usually represented in feudalistic form, which reveals a character's essence in the sort of work that he does. Regardless, these charismatic "enchanted enclaves" appear often enough throughout Dickens' novels that one might discern the conceptualization of a new kind of community that's based less on an assortment of functional routines within an organized structure of power than on a voluntary association of skilled individuals that springs up spontaneously from below, challenging the established order. This conception would be Dickens' response to the alienating impact of the rise of the professions: whereas the professions are based on a principle of exclusion, isolating the individual within the confines of a broader institutional structure of power, these miniature communities are open to anyone who happens to fall across the fragile boundary that separates them from the outside world.

CHAPTER 4

“A NEARLY PERISHED LINK”: DIGGORY VENN AS PROTOTYPICAL PROFESSIONAL IN THOMAS HARDY’S RETURN OF THE NATIVE

1.

In The Country and the City Raymond Williams criticizes the view of Hardy as just a rural novelist, a gifted peasant straddling two distinct cultures separated by space and time, the bucolic rural culture depicted in Hardy’s imaginary Wessex, and the culture of the city from which Clym Yeobright rebels and to which Jude Hawley aspires. Facile divisions between country and city, Williams argues, cannot do justice to the social complexity of the novels, for what we see in Hardy’s novels is not country against town, nor even custom against conscious intelligence, but “the more complicated and more urgent historical process in which education is tied to social advancement within a class society,” a process in which “culture and affluence come to be recognized as alternative aims.”²³ Williams’s comments point to a central problem in the reception of Hardy’s fiction: to a much greater extent than is the case for Dickens or Austen or Eliot, there is a temptation to reduce Hardy’s novels to a kind of ethnographic documentation, a temptation that was just as pressing in the nineteenth century as it is today, since for the vast majority of Hardy’s first readers the world represented in the Wessex novels was nothing like the world they inhabited in real life. The danger with Hardy’s novels has always been that the details of rural life could encourage an overly-romanticized reading,

²³ Raymond Williams, The Country and the City. (New York: Oxford UP, 1973), 202. Williams makes these comments in the context of arguing against the likes of Somerset Maugham, who see in Hardy little more than a peasant novelist. In order to move beyond this view, Williams argues for a change of perspective: “But to make these distinctions and to see the variations of response with the necessary clarity we have to get beyond the stereotypes of the autodidact and the countryman and see Hardy in his real identity: both the educated observer and the passionate participant, in a period of general and radical change” (203-204). Page numbers hereafter cited parenthetically in text.

overshadowing the much more critical ways in which the novels interrogate abstract divisions between country and city, past and present, public and private. This is a problem of which Hardy himself was acutely aware, and one can trace in the development of his art a burgeoning sense that the boundaries separating Wessex from the outside world are far more fluid than one might expect. As Williams notes, the complexity of Hardy's fiction

shows in nothing more than this: that he runs the whole gamut from an external observation of customs and quaintness, modulated by a distinctly patronizing affection (as in *Under the Greenwood Tree*), through a very positive identification of intuitions of nature and the values of shared work with human depth and fidelity (as in *The Woodlanders*), to the much more impressive but also much more difficult humane perception of limitations, which cannot be resolved by nostalgia or charm or the simple mysticism of nature, but which are lived through by all the characters, in the real life to which all belong, the limitations of the educated and the affluent bearing an organic relation to the limitations of the ignorant and the poor (as in parts of *Return of the Native* and in *Tess* and *Jude*). But to make these distinctions and to see the variations of response with the necessary clarity we have to get beyond the stereotypes of the autodidact and the countryman and see Hardy in his real identity: both the educated observer and the passionate participant, in a period of general and radical change. (203-204)

The period to which Williams alludes – the latter half of the nineteenth century – was indeed a period of general and radical change, and nowhere was this more evident than in the opposite ends of Hardy’s literary universe, the educated and relatively rarified realm of middle-class urban professionalism, and the agricultural life of the rural districts. The change experienced in both areas was a result of the late phases of the industrial revolution, with each side presenting a reverse image of the other: whereas in the cities the tendency was towards increasing compartmentalization and technical specialization, in the country the traditional division of labor was being slowly eroded by the importation into rural communities of new farming technologies, which Hardy depicts to great effect in the scene with the threshing machine in Tess of the d’Urbervilles. The difficulty for Hardy was to bridge these two worlds in a manner that respected their complexities, to present to his educated readers the outlines of a world that was deeply unfamiliar to them, and yet to do so in a way that would allow them to insert themselves imaginatively into the work, giving them touchstones, so to speak, wherein they might recognize associations familiar to them from their own set of experiences, without causing them to falsify or romanticize the subject-matter. In the following essay, I’ll focus on one such touchstone: the character of Diggory Venn, the reddleman, from Return of the Native. Hardy’s educated readers could identify with Diggory’s character, I’ll argue, because he displays several of the characteristics associated with the emergence of a new model of the professional man in the nineteenth century, one that was far more rational and calculating and much less tied to the needs of a particular community than his eighteenth century predecessor, who could generally rely on a broad network of institutional support in the form of aristocratic patronage and kinship to make his way in the world. What Diggory represents above all, I’ll argue, is the idea of an individual who by virtue of his particular occupation is

placed in an antagonistic relationship to traditional forms of community, and who, because he must struggle to create his career, rather than inherit it, has much more in common with the rugged individualism of the Smilesian self-made man than with the modest civility and gentlemanly behavior of the eighteenth century professional. Diggory is unique in Return of the Native inasmuch as he is the vehicle of a fundamentally modern urban experience within a predominately rural traditional setting: Diggory's character "feels" more modern than the furze-cutters, for instance, precisely because his behavior embodies what Burston Bledstein has called the "striking totality and self-sufficiency" of the middle-class professional, who often had "nowhere to return," nothing to fall back upon except his own self-reliance and his own will (177). Unlike Clym, for instance, who does indeed "return" to his native soil with idealistic notions about starting a school for the furze-cutters, Diggory uses his occupation to exploit whatever advantages he can to get ahead, whether he acts as servant, spy, or vigilante. In Diggory's special combination of patience, cunning, discipline, and ambition, nineteenth century readers would have recognized a set of attributes that were highly valued in the turbulent and uncertain world of Victorian middle-class professionalism. Moreover, in associating the cultivation of these attributes with the ability to successfully court good luck – in the gambling scene with Wildeve, for instance, fortune sides with the reddleman – the novel reiterates a fundamental doctrine of the times: success is not the result of blind chance, nor is it the exclusive right of those born into a world of privilege, but with the right training, the right discipline to "organize and control" one's surroundings, Fortuna herself can be brought to bear, and a person as lowly as a reddleman can rise through the ranks and win money, fame, and a happy marriage.

2.

Diggory thus serves as a “way in” for Hardy’s educated readers, a point of ideological contact amidst the unfamiliar territory of Egdon Heath. That the reader is meant to form a special relationship with him is evident from the very beginning of the novel, where the reader’s first broad view of the heath is focalized through him. After explaining that the “the scene before the reddleman’s eyes was a gradual series of ascents from the level of the road backward into the heart of the heath” (62), the narrator introduces the distant figure of Eustacia Vye from the point of view of a series of subjects indefinite enough that they could apply as much to the reader as they do to the reddleman. “The *traveller’s eye* hovered about these things for a time,” “the *instinct of an imaginative stranger* might have been to suppose it to be one of the Celts,” “the *imagination of the observer* clung by preference to that vanished solitary figure, as to something more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history...” (62-63) [my emphasis]. The narrator’s appeal to the imagination of “the observer” sets up an early and indelible connection between the reader and the reddleman, both of whom are sojourners on the heath, and yet who retain a cautious distance from the tragic destinies affecting the other characters in the novel. The reddleman’s significance is reinforced by his role as the unconscious catalyst of the action unfolding before his eyes: at the beginning of the scene, he meets Eustacia’s grandfather along the road and lets slip the information that he’s carrying a woman from Anglebury in his van, from which the grandfather surmises that something must have gone wrong with Thomasin’s wedding. The grandfather then carries the news to Eustacia, who appears on the barrow in the hopes of lighting a bonfire to signal Wildeve. Thus the reddleman serves to connect the beginning and end of the scene: the middle part of this chain of events happens offstage, of course, but the reddleman is the causal link between two occurrences that from the

reader's perspective appear to be unrelated but in time are revealed to be connected. This will not be the last time the reddleman is bound to the movement of the narrative in this way: at several moments his actions inadvertently drive the plot of the novel forward, granting him an air of what to the furze-cutters appears like supernaturalism but what to Hardy's educated nineteenth century readers would have appeared more like the work of providence – or, to put it more mundanely, good luck. This fortuitousness, the ability to be in the right place at the right time, and to reap the benefits of one's unintended consequences, is another instance of Diggory appealing to a distinctly middle-class careerist ideology, especially as it's a result of Diggory's occupation, which allows him to traverse the heath, familiarizing himself with its inhabitants and listening in on their conversations.

For Diggory, then, and by extension the reader, the heath is a great network of possibilities, a place to reinvent oneself and to gain a fresh start.²⁴ The heath is the perfect environment in which to do this, as it is liberated from a conservative grounding in tradition, and therefore lacks a specific community to place pressure on the individual to conform. There may be groupings on the heath – the furze-cutters, for instance – but there are no real *communities*, which, for many of the major characters, translates into no real outward checks on individual ambition. If there's one thing that can be gathered from Return of the Native, it is that individuals will behave exactly how they want to behave, no matter how foolish or self-destructive this behavior might be. This emphasis on the individual over the community is a direct result of the influence of the heath itself, which, as J. Hillis Miller has noted, contains an existential quality that lends itself well to the formation of individual

²⁴ See Wesley A. Kort, Place and Space in Modern Fiction. (Gainesville: Florida UP, 2004): “these characters, by turning from the heath and toward some other place, are attempting to locate themselves not in reality, but in fabricated or illusory space” (34). Kort points out that it is precisely this “illusory space” that allows the characters to eclipse their various histories.

character: “The heath,” writes Miller, “is neither a character in itself nor merely a dark background against which the action takes place. The heath is rather the embodiment of certain ways in which human beings may exist. Diggory Venn and Eustacia Vye rise out of the heath as versions of these two ways, Diggory the detached way of waiting and watching expressed by the heath, Eustacia the tragical possibilities of violence and the infinite longing the heath contains” (91). In the geography of the novel, the heath occupies a special class.²⁵ It’s true that the heath is rural, but it is not rural in the conventional sense of being agricultural; this is an important point, and the sensational rhetoric Hardy sometimes deploys in his descriptions – he likens the heath to something “timeless and indestructible,” a pagan outcrop stretching back to the “days of antiquity,” “the enemy of civilization,” with an imperturbable countenance” that had defied the “cataclysmic onset of centuries” – has a tendency to overshadow the otherwise careful attention he pays to the subtler nuances and distinctions of the heath, the way the land shapes the life and work of its occupants. In the scene with the November 5th bonfires, for instance, we get a sense of the heath’s internal divisions:

Attentive observation of their brightness, colour, and length of existence would have revealed the quality of the material burnt; and through that, to some extent the natural produce of the district to which each bonfire was situate. The clear, kingly effulgence that had characterized the majority expressed a heath and furze country like their own, which in one direction extended an unlimited number of miles; the rapid flares and extinctions at other points of the compass

²⁵ For an excellent discussion on the subject of laboring on the heath, see Merryn Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England. (New York: Columbia UP, 1972), 110-156

showed the lightest of fuel – straw, beanstalks, and the usual waste from arable land. The most enduring of all – steady unfaltering eyes like planets – signified wood, such as hazel-branches, thorn faggots, and stout billets...They occupied the remotest visible positions – sky backed summits rising out of rich coppice and plantation districts in the north, where the soil was different, and heath foreign and strange. (78-79)

The scene begins with the “kingly effulgence” of the furze country; shifts to the “rapid flares and extinctions” of the fertile land on the edge of the heath; and finishes with the “plantation districts to the north, where the soil was different, and the heath foreign and strange.” These are by no means extraneous details; Hardy uses them to outline the sociological makeup of the heath, as well as to foreshadow the drama to come. What first causes Eustacia Vye to stand out, for instance, is the fact that her bonfire – “the moon in the whole shining throng,” “its glow infinitely transcending the rest” (79) – is made not from furze, but from cleft-wood, a rare material on the heath, thus serving to elevate her above her surroundings. Hardy also makes a distinction between the sterility of Egdon heath and the fertility of the outlying areas. The majority of the people on the heath make their living not by growing things, but by collecting furze, or like Olly Dowden, by making heath brooms, or besons,” and Hardy contrasts this way of life with the productive agricultural life of the neighboring valleys, “where the meads begin,” emphasizing the tough, intractable nature of Egdon’s earth: “Not a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil.” But this is exactly what makes the heath worthy of remembrance: “In the heath’s barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian. There had been no obliteration, because there had been no tending” (66).

Whereas the farmer's life is calm and orderly, regulated by the cycle of the seasons, life on the heath is a day to day, hard-scrabble affair, always one step away from suffering and tragedy. Attempts to reclaim the land are nearly heroic acts, the stuff of legend, as we see in the description of Wildeve's patch:

a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could tilled died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself by fertilising it. Wildeve...received the honours due to those had gone before... (134)

This passage illustrates what's at stake in the struggle to make a living on the heath: naivety is punished with death. Those who don't possess the right combination of skills, resources, and luck will be destroyed, just as Wildeve is destroyed at the end of the novel. Because of the heath's multiple contradictions, rural and yet sterile, traditional and yet foreign, it refuses to be placed within an easily definable category – as the narrator points out, it's neither “a town, a village, or even a farm” – and the absence of both agriculture and civilized life make it an ambiguous no-man's land between the farming districts where Diggory Venn is from and the faraway urban centers of Paris and London, frustrating simplistic divisions between country and city. It's this quality that Raymond Williams is getting at when he criticizes those who see in Hardy only a regional novelist, the last chronicler of a rural civilization: what is represented in Hardy's novels, writes Williams, “is a moving out from old ways and places ideas and feelings; a discovery in the new of certain unlooked-for problems, unexpected and very sharp crises, conflicts of desire and possibility” (198). Compared to the comparatively sheltered life of the farmer in the valley, or

the professional in the town, life on the heath involves a great deal of uncertainty, which finds rhetorical expression in the frequency of the military and diplomatic terms used by the characters to describe their dealings with one another. Diggory Venn engages in “countermoves,” he “maneuvers,” “reconnoiters.” The little flat stone upon which Diggory and Wildeve play dice is an “arena vast and important as a battle-field” (290). The fruit of Mrs. Yeobright’s “diplomacy was indeed remarkable” (157), she “thanked God for the weapon the reddleman had put in her hand” (157). Wildeve feels a “certain legitimacy in combating such a coalition” (330), admits it wouldn’t be “good policy” to confide in Eustacia” (116).

For a certain segment of the heath, “policy” is indeed the overriding concern, and the result is to divide the heath into two predominant social groupings, those with the leisure time to see in the heath a chance for opportunity and political gamesmanship – Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright, Clym, Wildeve, Diggory – and those for whom the heath produces nothing but “fern, furze, heath lichens, and moss” (236), reducing human labor to a few mechanical, barely productive tasks, such as cutting the furze. Eustacia’s comparison of furze-cutters with “slaves, and the Israelites in the Egypt, and such people” (345) isn’t so far off the mark, as the political organization of the heath resembles nothing so much as the structure of an ancient city-state, with a ruling noble class supported by a formless laboring mass below, an analogy that’s encouraged by Hardy’s constant use of classical metaphors to describe the heath. Unlike their counterparts further up the social ladder the furze-cutters know exactly what their place is and accept it without question; they function as a kind of sardonic Greek chorus, frequently berating their betters for failing to follow in the footsteps of tradition as they have done, thus making Clym’s ill-fated mission to set up a school for the furze-cutters all the more ironic. “That lad ought never to have left home...his father’s occupation would have suited him best” (147),

remarks one of them, upon Clym Yeobright's return from Paris. What Marx feared most about the division of labor is what characterizes the labor of the furze-cutters: the absence of any specialized skill set. Even after losing his sight Clym Yeobright picks the work up easily without any special training, and the aspects he loves most about it are those that emphasize the body over the mind, the "monotony" of the labor, its soothing rhythms, its organic closeness to the earth, which releases him from the painful concentration of his studies. If specialization serves to distinguish, to particularize, to discern, laboring on the heath achieves the opposite effect, swallowing the individual up in the gruesome generality of the heath. Clym was a "brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, nothing more," "his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person" (312). When his own mother observes him working on the heath, he's "not more distinguishable from the scene around him than a caterpillar from the leaf it feeds on," a "silent being...of no more account in life than an insect" (339). Even Clym recognizes the marginal nature of his changed condition: "his conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded" (313).

Because of the generalized nature of their labor, the furze-cutters show a perfect synchronicity between *being* and *doing*: in other words, they literally are what they do. It's why they tend to appear as a group in the novel, rather than as autonomous individuals, their shared occupation overriding distinctions between the separate characters. But higher up on the social ladder the line between "being" and "doing" becomes much more ambiguous: for one thing, the value of a particular kind of work can mean different things to different characters within the same social network. While furze-cutting for Eustacia is a slavish occupation, for Clym it's a "useful pastime," something he takes up merely for the enjoyment of it. Diggory Venn's occupation as a reddleman is referred to as a "trade" by Mrs. Yeobright, but a

“vocation” by the narrator, who notes in a detached, nearly anthropological tone of voice, made even more empirical sounding by its switch into the present tense, that Diggory is a “singular curiosity,” one of a “class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex” (59). In this instance, “trade” and “vocation” carry vastly different significations: the first is an attempt to define Diggory’s location on the social map – after all, Mrs. Yeobright doesn’t want her daughter marrying a “tradesman” – while the second emphasizes the uniqueness of Diggory’s occupation in a sociological sense, so as to generate interest among Hardy’s bourgeois readers. Furthermore, at various times in the novel Clym’s occupation as a diamond merchant is referred to as a “business,” an “enterprise,” and a “trade,” all of which carry different meanings depending on the context and the speakers’ perspective. The point is that for the non-furze cutting population, the value of work has become divorced from any kind of traditional foundation: characters are free to reinterpret the work as they think fit, to see in it an opportunity for spiritual salvation, for instance, or a chance to reinvent themselves outside traditional class boundaries. For these characters, occupational identities are a kind of fluid strategy, a way of obscuring one’s allegiance to the past. “The only absolute certainty about Clym Yeobright,” the narrator insists, “is that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born” (226). This is true for Eustacia as well, who, when she briefly takes up acting so as to spy on Clym, feels “more and more interest in life. Here was something to do...she would make a dash which, just for the time, was not unlike the move of a naturally lively person” (182-3). In the case of Diggory Venn, the occupation of reddleman quite literally serves as a mask to hide his true origins, the red dust of his trade covering him from head to toe and lending him an air of mystery and even danger. Humphrey remarks at one point that he’s seen “the young man’s face before, but where, or how, or what his name is, I don’t know” (82), and the narrator classes him with gypsies

and “criminals for whose misdeeds other men had suffered” (132), a far cry from his previous life as a dairy farmer. Clym too is obscured by the occupations he takes up, as even his own mother fails to recognize him as he’s cutting furze on the heath.

But if occupational identities tend to obscure these characters’ origins, it’s equally true that outward signs are usually present to alert the attentive onlooker to the past that’s being covered up. It dawns on Mrs. Yeobright that the furze-cutter is her son when she notices that his walk is “exactly as her husband’s used to be” (339). And as far as Diggory is concerned, the only forbidding point about him is his color: “freed from that he would have been as agreeable a specimen of rustic manhood as one would often see” (132). Indeed, Diggory almost seems to have the features of a gentleman: “a certain well-to-do air about the man suggested that he was not poor for his degree. The natural query of an observer would have been, why should such a promising being as this have hidden his prepossessing exterior by adopting that singular occupation?” (59). In terms of work, what separates characters like Clym and Diggory from the furze-cutters is that their ontology, their fundamental being, can be separated from the types of work they that do. In Novel Professions, Jennifer Ruth argues that this distinction was very much alive in the Victorian consciousness, especially among the professional class, who experienced “a tension between being and doing, between the fact that people discover themselves to *be* suited for a certain line of work (via competitive examinations) and the fact that they must also over the course of time *do* that work, and thus come to fulfill the promise of their initial discovery” (3). Unlike working on a factory assembly line, for instance, professional specialization requires the exploitation of individual skills, gifts, or talents that suit a person for a particular calling. “By uncovering and defining one’s particular nature,” writes Burton Bledstein, “every person became conscious not only of his ability but of his limitations. By freeing

one's nature, by releasing one's inborn capacities, by being one's real self, a person became aware of the boundaries that circumscribed common abilities and talents" (54). However, for the Victorians the relationship between discovering these talents and abilities and putting them to good use could often be vexed and troubling. As mentioned in my earlier chapter, this tension forms the basis for much of the plot of Middlemarch, for instance, which one critic has labeled "the novel of vocation,"²⁶ and it also lies behind the plaintive, self-reflexive cry of the narrator of Sartor Resartus: "Hast thou a certain Faculty, a certain worth, such even as the most have not; or art thou the completest Dullard of these modern times?" (67). In The Return of the Native this tension between being and doing serves as a stronger indicator of social divisions than traditional boundaries based on class, since the higher up the social ladder you go, the more the characters display an inability to settle on a determined way of life, until the main thing that seems to separate the "higher" characters from the furze-cutters is not money or family connections but the sense of having not fulfilled one's specific purpose in life. "Well as my views changed my course became very depressing," Clym tells Humphrey, speaking of his time in Paris. "I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavoring to put off one life for another sort of life, which was not better than the life I had known before" (229). Eustacia Vye also shows a distinct lack of purpose, a longing to become something different from what she is: "If you go back again I'll – be something" (269), she says, while trying to convince Clym to move to Paris.

For at least some of the characters, this lack of purpose is clearly the result of being uprooted from a stable community. At the time the novel was set, the industrial revolution was transforming the landscape of Britain, but in The Return of

²⁶ See Alan Mintz, George Eliot and the Novel of Vocation. (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1978)

the Native the effects of industry are visible only through references to forces that lie outside the heath, such as when Hardy credits the railways for the disappearance of reddlemen “of the old school” (131). Cut off from the surrounding society, with an atmosphere redolent of Britain’s pagan past, the heath may appear shielded from historical change, and yet Hardy manages to evoke a sense of rupture within the atmosphere of the novel, not by showing where the instruments of progress – the factory, the telegraph, the railway, etc. – come into conflict with the traditional world of the heath, but in terms of the personal histories of the major characters, for whom a set of skills handed down from one generation to the next has been interrupted by the explosive rise of industrial capitalism and modern specialization. The nature of working life in Britain was transformed during this period to an unparalleled extent in British history, as Britain went from being a semi-feudal aristocracy with most of the wealth being concentrated in land and private property to a nation of jobholders, where the wealth was concentrated in much more mobile and fluid forms. The professions expanded widely during this period, a process sociologists refer to as the “professionalization” of society.²⁷ “Between 1841 and 1881,” writes historian Harold Perkin, “professional occupations trebled in number, compared with a two-thirds increase in the general population, and came to constitute a substantial element in the middle-class” (Origins 426). By the 1860s, Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse report, “What had seemed a

²⁷ For the account of professionalization, I’m indebted to two accounts. Magali Larson’s sociological analysis, The Rise of Professionalism (Berkeley: California UP, 1977) is by far the most thorough, although she gives as much attention to America as Britain. Harold Perkins’s Origins of English Society (London: Routledge, 1969) explores the rise of professionalism within the larger context of the Industrial Revolution. See also, W.J. Reader, Professional Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966). Several works of literary criticism also discuss the rise of professionalism. See Lawrence Rothfield, Vital Signs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Alexander Welsh’s George Eliot and Blackmail (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), pp. 33-84, Alan Mintz’s George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), pp. 13-20, James Eli Adams’s Dandies and Desert Saints (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1995), and David Trotter’s Paranoid Modernisms: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

subordinate sector of the middle class made up of managers, professionals, experts of various kinds was running England” (“The Vanishing Intellectual” 117). Throughout the 1850s and 1860s scores of young Britons found themselves embarking upon careers for which their upbringing had in no way prepared them, which resulted in a fluidity of social mobility that intermeshed with older stratifications based on class. In Return of the Native, the ramifications of this shift, its tendency to cut people off from their social moorings, appear in the sometimes violent disjunction between a character’s longing for order and the chaos and disorder of his or her past. In the case of Eustacia, the daughter of a Corfu bandmaster, it’s as if the past had failed to lay the groundwork for any kind of future: her mind is one in which were “juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and new...every bizarre effect that could result from the random intertwining of watering-place glitter with the grand solemnity of a heath, was to be found in her” (176). Other characters too show a marked ambivalence toward the roles laid out for them by custom and tradition. Diggory Venn, out of a “want of interest in his proper station in life” (110), gives up his life as a small-time dairy farmer in order to become a reddleman, an occupation that is far beneath him in terms of his natural talents and abilities, as the narrator mentions repeatedly. Clym Yeobright leaves a successful career as a diamond merchant in Paris to set up a school on Egdon Heath that never materializes, next becomes a furze cutter, and at last discovers his calling as an itinerant preacher. Wildeve was educated as an engineer, but “threw away his chance” (119), and now works as an innkeeper, the mark of his fall apparent not only in the gossip of the furze-cutters, who insist that he was “brought up to better things than keeping the Quiet Woman” (119), but in the narrator’s repeated referral to him as the “ex-engineer.” Even Mrs. Yeobright is a “curate’s daughter, who had once dreamed of doing better things” (247).

The challenges these characters face, their rootless wanderings, would have been instantly recognized by Hardy's city-dwelling readers. The sense of separation between "being" and "doing," the potential and the actual, was particularly acute among the nineteenth century professional class, who, shorn of tradition, often had to make their way in an uncertain world with little help or guidance. As Burton Bledstein notes, the "fluid environment of the nineteenth century made it possible for an ambitious young man with a will of his own to put his own feelings before social duty, and find easier access than ever before to a growing array of professions, including a number of new semi-professions" (175). In his journals, Emerson illustrated the case with considerable wit and dismay: "*The New Professions*: The phrenologist; the railroad man; the landscape gardener; the lecturer; the sorcerer, rapper, mesmeriser, medium; the daguerreotypist. *Proposed*: The Naturalist, and the Social Undertaker" (226). As Emerson himself was to find, along with countless others in the nineteenth century, the heightened level of choice could be liberating, but also had the potential to be deeply alienating, as it brought new urgency to the question: "What shall I be?" In the closed world of the eighteenth century aristocracy, professional positions had been inherited or doled out through patronage, but in the nineteenth century a new model of the professional emerged, one that was much more rational, calculating, and prudent, dividing life into a series of rising stages that culminated in the mastery of a specialized field of expertise.

At first glance, it would appear that Hardy's novels were very far from such matters, but a closer examination reveals an awareness of the consequences of this new model of professionalism. Hardy was chiefly engaged by the unrealistic expectations created by new career options available to families that had been rooted in traditional work for generations. As W.J. Reader points out, "for a boy without money or family connections, the road to a professional career was almost

impossibly hard” (195) – this, of course, could be a fairly accurate summary of the plot of Jude the Obscure. In Return of the Native, Hardy’s representation of the professions is surprisingly complex, an indication of his ambivalence towards the subject. On the one hand, we find the world of the professions represented in its classic role as the epicenter of upper-middle class gentility, a sphere both distant and desirable, conferring rank and social prestige: Diggory Venn, for instance, initially becomes a reddleman only after Thomasin tells him that her aunt would wish her to “look a little higher than a small dairy-farmer, and marry a professional man” (98). Likewise, Clym Yeobright tells her that she would be better off marrying a “professional man, or somebody of that sort, by going into the town and forming acquaintances there” (414). There seems to be a general sense that Thomasin is too delicate for the heath, that as a wife and mother she deserves a more sheltered existence, and so “marrying a professional man” means securing for Thomasin the domestic comforts of town life, comforts nowhere to be found on Egdon Heath, with its “disconnected tufts of furze” looking like “impaled heads above a city wall” (107). The professions, then, are associated in the novel with upward mobility and domestic security, which are placed in opposition to the violent extremes and pagan grandeur of the heath. Yet precisely because the heath comes to dominate the novel’s action, the professions come to seem less than they might first appear: are not as desirable as they might first appear: there seems to be something “unmanly” about them, for instance, or they insist too heavily on privacy, leaving a character ill-equipped to deal with the realities of life in a changing world. The only character with a truly professional education in the novel is Wildeve, but on the heath his training as an engineer is useless to him. Likewise, Clym wishes to “enter his new profession with the least possible delay” (300), without realizing what the furze-cutters are saying about his educational projects: “‘tis good-hearted of the young

man,” remarks one, “but, for my part, I think he better mind his own business” (229). Moreover, it’s curious to note that the narrator refers to Clym’s ambitions to be a teacher as a “profession,” yet to his career as a diamond merchant as a “business,” his furze-cutting as a “pastime,” and his open-air preaching as a “vocation,” further suggesting a certain naivety in the pursuit of a “profession,” a tendency to be shutout from existing realities. Despite being “a product of the heath,” “permeated with its scenes, its substance, and with its odours” (231), Clym is curiously ignorant of the social tapestry of the heath, its gossip and goings-on – it takes him days to learn of the “silly story that people are circulating about Thomasin and Mrs. Wildeve,” (214) for instance – and this ignorance is mixed with his professional goals, since Clym wishes to raise the furze-cutters to a point where they’ll stop indulging in “silly stories” and take up more enlightened matters, without realizing that it is his ignorance, rather than the furze cutters’, that is the real problem. Above all, what the novel suggests is that in order for a “professional” to be successful there must be a broad base of institutional support wherein the professional may work and pursue his goals; absent this, the odds of failure become overwhelming, as is evident from Wildeve’s fall in the social ladder. The heath, in a sense, represents just this absence; void of all social institutions, it cannot provide a basis for a professional of the traditional stripe to thrive.

Yet where Wildeve and Clym Yeobright fail, Diggory succeeds. By the end of the novel, he’s given up his trade as a reddleman and won the hand of the girl who had once told him that she could only marry a “professional man.” The novel makes clear his livelihood is scarcely different than a criminal’s in terms of reputation, and yet he has invaded the professional’s territory, co-opted the earthly rewards the novel defines as properly belonging to the professional alone. Diggory’s unusual occupation and marginal status allow him much more flexibility in relation to class

than the other characters in the novel. While at first glance it might appear that Diggory Venn is of the same class as the furze-cutters, really his social position is much harder to define. His background is rural, but as a former dairy farmer, he belongs to a much different kind of rural setting than the furze-cutters, who tend to be hard-scrabble types eking out a difficult existence in a fierce and untamed wilderness. Underneath the red dust of his trade, which he has adopted in experimental fashion, “for a freak,” as he puts it to Mrs. Yeobright, are embodied the positive values one typically associates with the country: health, strength, frankness of spirit, a kind of natural well-born gentility, which make him “as agreeable a specimen of rustic manhood as one would often see” (132), and which are contrasted with the intellectual strain visible on Clym Yeobright’s face. Unlike the furze-cutters, for example, he retains his composure when in Eustacia’s presence: “her close approach did not cause him to writhe uneasily, or shift his feet, or show any of those little signs which escape an ingenuous rustic at the advent of womankind” (143). Moreover, he’s far from being impoverished: “seeing that his expenditure was only one-fourth of his income, he might have been called a prosperous man” (134). All of these factors combine to place Diggory in a class of his own, distinct from the other laborers on the heath:

The reddleman lived like a gypsy; but gypsies he scorned. He was about as thriving as traveling basket and mat makers; but he had nothing to do with them. He was more decently born and brought up than the cattle-drivers who passed and repassed him in his wanderings: but they merely nodded to him. His stock was more valuable than that of pedlars; but they did not think so, and passed his cart with eyes straight ahead. He was such an unnatural color to look

at that the men of round-about and wax-work shows seemed gentleman beside him; but he considered them low company, and remained aloof. Among all of these squatters and folks of the road the reddleman continually found himself; yet he was not of them. His occupation tended to isolate him, and isolated he was mostly seen to be. (132)

Like other characters in the novel, Diggory both does and does not belong to the heath, but he is unique in turning this to his own advantage. On the one hand, he has a knowledge and mastery of its terrain that is unrivaled by the other characters, and yet he is not a “product” of the heath in the way that the furze-cutters are: like a self-inflicted wound, his outsider status, his “unnatural color,” is literally marked on his body, there for all to see. What Diggory lacks is an external world to confirm his inward sense of self-worth, and so the red dust must serve in its place, functioning as a badge of distinction as much as it is an indicator of Diggory’s pariah status. Diggory’s occupation is more than just an occupation; it’s a form of self-preservation, a way of keeping alive one’s self-autonomy under hostile circumstances. By cultivating an existence beyond the pale of all easily classifiable social categories, he becomes, in a sense, a category all his own, thus winning Thomasin’s approval by the end of the novel “that men of his character are mostly so independent” (458). This personal sense of independence is what makes him the reverse image of Clym Yeobright, who wishes to “raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class,” and moreover, “was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed” (230). Diggory’s trajectory in the novel is the opposite of Clym Yeobright’s: both characters undergo “returns” in the novel, but whereas Clym returns to the world of the heath, with its tendency to dominate

and overwhelm human agency, Diggory's is a return to the world outside, back to the bucolic stability of the country, and to a burgeoning recognition that the world is bigger than the heath alone. The description of his wedding to Thomasin at the end of the novel suggests the change:

In a moment an open fly was driven past, in which sat Venn and Mrs. Venn, Yeobright, and a grand relative of Venn's who had come from Budmouth for the occasion. The fly had been hired at the nearest town, regardless of distance and cost, there being nothing on Egdon's Heath, in Venn's opinion, dignified enough for such an even when such a woman as Thomasin was the bride. (468)

Unlike Clym Yeobright, Diggory doesn't see the heath in a strictly personal or nostalgic vein; he understands the limitations of the heath and grants the world beyond its due measure of respect, understanding that despite his unusual background, and odd choice of occupation, he must now offer Thomasin the domestic comforts that would have been hers had she voyaged to town and married a "professional" man.

As is made clear, Diggory's success is owing to the fact that he understands the practical importance of money in a way that his "professional" rivals do not. As he explains to Mrs. Yeobright at one point, "There's many a calling that don't bring in so much as mine, if it comes to money. And perhaps I'm not so much worse off than Wildeve. There's nobody so poor as these professional fellows who have failed" (150). On the heath, the disinterestedness that liberates the professional man from the grubby job of having to worry about money is a liability more than anything else, because it distances the individual from the harsh necessities of life.

Diggory understands that what's really at the basis of the domestic comforts that the professional life can provide is not idealistic love, as Clym mistakenly believes, but economics. He displays an acute awareness of the importance of money throughout the entire novel, not only in the gambling scene with Wildeve, where "Fortune had fallen unmistakably in love with the reddleman tonight" (291), but also on the eve of his wedding, when he remarks to his bride-to-be that "I have got so mixed up with business of one sort and t'other that my soft sentiments are gone off in vapour like. Yes, I am given up body and soul to the making of money. Money is all my dream" (458). And yet the scene doesn't ask us to condemn him for this, partly because there's an air of levity in his remarks – Thomasin, in response, looks at him "in exact balance between taking his words seriously and judging them as said to tease her" (458) – and partly because it's clear that now that Diggory has reached a certain level of material success he can afford to have "soft sentiments" again: in answer to Thomasin's rebuke that "he used to be so nice," he replies that "what a man has once been he may be again" (458).

At first glance, this worldly concern for money seems to contradict the curious air of disinterestedness Diggory shows throughout The Return of the Native. Whereas both Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright practice deception in order to achieve their ends – a deception that takes gendered form in the novel, since as Mrs Yeobright remarks at one point, "a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close" (273) – Diggory must continually "play the card of truth," using himself as an exemplar of a kind of higher moral law in the hopes of shaming his adversaries into letting down their guard. Eustacia Vye marvels at his remarkable degree of selflessness when Diggory tells her that if Thomasin cannot be happy without Wildeve, he will do his "duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought" (208):

Eustacia looked curiously at the singular man who spoke thus. What a strange sort of love, to be entirely free from that quality of selfishness which frequently the chief constituent of the passion, and sometimes its only one! The reddleman's disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshoot respect by being barely comprehended; and she almost thought it absurd. (208-209)

Ultimately, what's at the origin of this selflessness is his *occupation*: that Diggory cannot appear "other than he is" is quite literally true, since he is stained with the red dust of his trade, which, as he remarks to Johnny Nonesuch, would take six months to remove: "'tis grow'd into my skin and won't wash out" (128-129). Despite the air of mystery that hangs around his person, Diggory Venn is immediately recognized wherever he goes on the heath, like a walking billboard: he cannot engage in the sort of deceptive arts practiced by Eustacia Vye when she appears as a mummer at the Yeobright's cottage, for instance, because his surface appearance has become fixed and static thanks to his trade. In his situation, the next best option to deception, he realizes, is simply to tell the truth.

However, what could be taken as two contradictory sides of Diggory's character – his apparent selflessness on the one hand and his concern about money on the other – are not as exclusive as they might seem. The Return of the Native makes an explicit connection between deception and self-interest, wherein a certain amount of dissembling is necessary in order to pursue one's goals – "it is the instinct of every one to look after their own" (303) says Mrs. Yeobright, according to whom a little duplicity is better than embracing an individual morality so uncompromising that it fails to make its way in the world. At first glance, Diggory Venn might appear to be free from such practices, but a closer look reveals the awareness on his part that

cultivating the *appearance* of selflessness is not the same thing as actually being selfless. Behind the façade of selflessness, lies a cunning, rational mind, one that sees the political advantages of remaining in a state of perceived powerlessness. Far from being a helpless victim of circumstance or a servant in the affairs of others, Diggory shows a remarkable talent for strategy, steadily plotting his course through the tangled web of human relationships on the heath. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, we find him surveying the scene, “as if considering the next step that he should take” (62). Later, “stung with suspicion of wrong to Thomasin,” he is “aroused to strategy in a moment” (135). At one point, it “occurs to the perspicacious reddleman” that he would have “acted more wisely by appearing less unimpressible, and he resolved to correct the error as soon as he could find opportunity.” When it suits his purpose, he is capable of dissembling just as well as Eustacia or Mrs. Yeobright, even going so far as to blend into the actual landscape of the heath:

He took two turves as he lay, and dragged them over him till one covered his head and shoulders, the other his back and legs. The reddleman would now have been quite invisible, even by daylight; the turves, standing upon him with the heather upwards, looked precisely as if they were growing. He crept along again, and the turves upon his back crept with him. Had he approached without any covering the chances are that he would not have been perceived in the dusk; approaching thus, it was as though he burrowed underground. In this manner he came quite close to where the two were standing. (136)

Diggory's selflessness, then, is largely a charade, a calculated move to advance his own interests on the heath. In nearly every case, what we see in his character is not a pure act of selflessness, but a crafted one, one that is intended to disarm his opponents by lowering their sense of his capabilities.

Diggory's craftiness in this respect is simply an extension of his worldly, specialized know-how, his ability to master multiple tasks and apply them successfully to real-life situations of conflict, danger, and rapid change. If the main impression we take away from Wildeve's character is fecklessness, and from Clym's character idealism, the impression we take away from Diggory's character is one of specialized competence, the particularity of his occupation extending by association to a number of other specialized areas of practical knowledge, such as his ability to make traps to catch Wildeve in the "silent system" he devises as a way to protect Thomasin, or his expert mastery of the tricky terrain of the heath: "Only a man accustomed to nocturnal rambles could at this hour have descended those shaggy slopes with Venn's velocity without falling headlong into a pit, or snapping off his leg by jamming his foot into some rabbit-burrow, but Venn went on without any inconvenience to himself, and he reached his destination in about half an hour" (327). Whereas the heath destroys Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright, and Wildeve, and comes very close to destroying Clym, Diggory seems to thrive in its environment, as if he were a creature perfectly adapted to its vicissitudes. His rational, calculating manner, as well as his acquisitiveness, must be understood in light of this adaptability, which is why his interest in making money doesn't appear like outright greed, but takes its place alongside all of the other tactics he uses for survival on the heath, becoming just another tool in his wide arsenal of resources. It's obvious from such passages as the one above that Diggory's "role" involves much more than simply selling riddle to farmers: as the narrator notes, "the sale of riddle was not

Diggory's primary object in remaining on the heath, particularly at so late a period of the year, when most travelers of his class had gone into winter hiding" (205). The unspoken implication here is that his primary object is Thomsin, and it is for her that Diggory becomes a spy, a servant, and an outdoorsman all wrapped into one. But the important thing is that Diggory views the heath not as a system of universals, as does Clym Yeobright, but as a number of particular local situations that require an ever-evolving set of responses.

Diggory's emphasis on the particular over the universal is of course contrasted with the character of Clym Yeobright, who sees an opportunity to remake the heath according to abstract ideas he has acquired during his time in Paris, "where," the narrator records, "he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time" (230). Hardy doesn't say so explicitly, but the "ethical systems" popular in Paris in the early 1840s were the pre-Marxian doctrines of the Utopian socialists, such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, and especially the anarchist Proudhon, whose What is Property? had appeared in 1840, two years before Clym's departure from Paris. A common thread linking all of these thinkers together is the tendency to view the class as a more significant political entity than the individual, and in The Return of the Native we see this manifested not only in Clym's personal sense of self-sacrifice, but in his mission to enlighten the ignorant laborers on the heath. The problem, however, is that Clym lacks what Diggory has in spades: a talent for practical action, which the narrator expresses as a "capacity to handle things:" "In the interests of renown the forwardness should lie chiefly in the capacity to handle things. Successful propagandists have succeeded because the doctrine they bring into form is that which their listeners have for some time felt without being able to shape" (232). What Clym can't understand is that the success of his project depends not on his own enthusiasm, but on needs and desires that will allow it take concrete shape,

none of which exist on the heath. In expecting the furze-cutters to immediately conform to his own inward sense of mission, he fails to take stock of particulars, seeing everything in terms of universals: unlike Diggory, he is incapable of letting realities work on him from a distance and adjusting to them accordingly. The result of this is that his character appears much less worldly, and much more bound to a life of transcendent purpose, which is expressed in the title of the final chapter: “Cheerfulness Again Asserts Itself at Blooms-End, and Clym Finds his Vocation.” The word “vocation” appears again in final paragraph of the novel, where it is once more associated with self-sacrifice and a devotion to universals, “the opinions common to all good men.”

Yeobright had, in fact, found his vocation in the career of an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects; and from this day he laboured incessantly in that office, speaking not only in simple language on Rainbarrow and in the hamlets round, but in a more cultivated strain elsewhere – from the steps and porticoes of town-halls, from market-crosses, from conduits, on esplanades and on wharves, from the parapets of bridges, in barns and outhouses, and all other such places in the neighbouring Wessex towns and villages. He left alone creeds and systems of philosophy, finding enough to occupy his tongue in the opinions and actions common to all good men. Some believed him, and some believed not; some said that his words were commonplace, others complained of his want of theological doctrine; while others again remarked that it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who

could not see to do anything else. But everywhere he was kindly received, for the story of his life had become generally known. (475)

The ambiguity of this ending, the sense that something is going unfulfilled, stems from the fact that Clym's vocation is all-consuming, encompassing the entire imaginary world of Wessex, and leaving very little space for individual needs. His desire to lift the class at the expense of the individual has turned into a livelihood in which the individual barely registers in terms of consequence. Whereas Diggory's selflessness is merely strategic and temporary, an act to be cast off along with the opprobrious dust of his occupation, Clym's selflessness is essential, the result of an intense private guilt he feels in relation to the past. Nothing better shows the difference between the two men than the scene depicting Diggory's wedding to Thomasin at the end of the novel, where Clym cuts a lonely figure indeed. Unwilling to take part in the celebration, Clym listens to the wedding celebration through a window in a "private nook" outside the house, where, owing to his weakened eyesight, he must have the action narrated to him by a young furze-cutter:

'Tell me,' asked Clym, 'is Thomasin in the room? I can see something moving in front of the candles that resembles her shape I think.'

'Yes. She does seem happy. She is red in the face, and laughing at something Fairway has said to her. O my!'

'What noise was that?' said Clym.

'Mr Venn is so tall that he has knocked his head against the beam in giving a skip as he passed under. Mrs. Venn has run up quite frightened and now she's put her hand to his head to feel if there's a

lump. And now they be all laughing again as if nothing had happened.

‘Do any of them seem to care about my not being there?’

‘No, not a bit in the world. Now they are all holding up their glasses and drinking somebody’s health.’

‘I wonder if it is mine?’

‘No, ‘tis Mr. and Mrs. Venn’s, because he is making a hearty sort of speech. There – now Mrs. Venn has got up, and is going away to put on her things, I think.’

‘Well, they haven’t concerned themselves about me, and it is quite right they should not. It is all as it should be, and Thomasin at least is happy. We will not stay any longer now, as they will soon be coming out to go home.’ (471-472)

The contrast between the happy images on the inside and Clym’s pathetic state on the outside is made even sharper by Thomasin’s wishing him goodnight by remarking “‘it will be rather lonely for you, Clym, after the hubbub we have been making’” (472). Later, sitting alone in the dark in the house he’s inherited from his mother, a house in which, as if to remind him of his own mortality, “the ticking of the clock was the only sound that greeted him, for not a soul remained” (472), Clym senses the presence of his mother and is overwhelmed by a sense of obligation to her memory:

His mother’s old chair was opposite; it had been sat in that evening by those who had scarcely remembered that it ever was hers. But to Clym she was almost a presence there, now as always. Whatever she

was in other people's memories, in his she was the sublime saint whose radiance even his tenderness for Eustacia could not obscure. But his heart was heavy; that mother had *not* crowned him in the day of his espousals and in the day of the gladness of his heart. And events had borne out the accuracy of her judgement, and proved the devotedness of her care. He should have heeded her for Eustacia's sake even more than for his own. 'It was all my fault,' he whispered. 'O, my mother, my mother! would to God that I could live my life again, and endure for you what you endured for me!' (473)

Unlike Diggory, Clym never escapes a longing for the domestic security of his first home, and it is this longing, this original nostalgia, that makes him blind to the specific realities of the heath. Having never left home in his mind, he cannot see the ways in which his own age and experiences have changed him, separating him forever from the associations he formed of the heath in his childhood. In seeking through his vocation to embrace the universal, he is in effect trying to mollify the past, hoping that through a definitive act of selflessness he might make amends for the awful burden of that whisper: "it was all my fault."

While it is probable that nineteenth century readers would have sympathized with Clym's plight – "as a source of individual discipline and isolation in a mobile society," writes Burton Bledstein, "the anxiety of returning to the community of the past, one's home and origins, has been inestimable" (170) – it's even more probable that they would have seen themselves in Diggory, who by the end of the novel overcomes his lowly origins by marrying Thomasin and embraces a future of wealth and happiness. As mentioned earlier, Hardy encourages this interpretation by portraying in Diggory's character a number of qualities associated with the realm of

middle-class professionalism, including competence, expertise, and a practical combination of disinterestedness and shrewdness towards the question of money. However, to understand more fully what Hardy's readers would have valued in Diggory's character it might be useful to take a lead from an insight in Bruce Robbins' essay on Bleak House. As Robbins' notes, the word *aporia* comes from the Greek *poros*, which means path, passage, or ford; *aporia* is in fact a near synonym of "no way out," but *poros* also means – to draw on the work of Marcel Détienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, whose book Les Ruses de l'intelligence studies the role of cunning intelligence in Greek culture and society – "a stratagem, the expedient which the cunning of an intelligent being can devise in order to escape from an *aporia*."²⁸ As Détienne and Vernant point out, *poros* is strongly associated with the skill or craft of specialized workers, belonging to "the entire collection of technical activities represented in the world of men by a wide range of know-how from metallurgy and pottery to weaving and carpentry and including the skills of the charioteer and the pilot" (280). Political in its very definition, and differing from contemplative philosophy in that it eschews universals, *poros* is a practical or professional know-how that concerns moments of risk, like those of the "navigator, the doctor, the athlete, the politician, and the sophist" (Robbins 229). In contrast to Clym Yeobright, who in The Return of the Native gives himself up to an abstract longing for universals, what Diggory Venn displays is the quality of *poros*, the ingenuity of the specialist, who, by respecting the sheer abundance of particularity in the world, turns his training to political advantage and discovers "the way out."

²⁸ See Bruce Robbins, "Telescopic Philanthropy," Nation and Narration. (London: Routledge, 1990), 150

CHAPTER 5

POSTSCRIPT: SOME REFLECTIONS ON SPECIALIZATION AND THE NOVEL

George Orwell once remarked that the modern novelist is so hopelessly isolated that the typical modern novel is a novel about a novelist.²⁹ Orwell's comment indicates a challenge that has been facing novelists ever since the early days of the industrial revolution: the problem of representing an increasingly specialized and compartmentalized society from a single point of view. Today, it's easy to see the influence that specialization has on the novel in the way that "research" has become a routine part of a novelist's job: if a novelist is writing a novel about lawyers, for instance, it's generally expected that he or she will spend a considerable amount of time studying the professional lives of lawyers. Surveying the state of the contemporary novel, one might conclude that a genre that once aimed to represent a total society with comprehensive breadth has today become fractured into a potpourri of disjunctive micro-worlds. Just how difficult it can be to transcend one's subjective limitations in a society structured around an advanced stage of the division of labor is not only suggested by the number of gifted contemporary novelists who have written novels about academia,³⁰ but also the fact that extra-literary research has today become part of the novelist's art to an extent that would have astonished novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Take the case of *Saturday* (2005), by Ian McEwan, which tells the story of Henry Perowne, a London neurosurgeon. The novel provides an in-depth look at professional life of its protagonist, and McEwan displays

²⁹ George Orwell, "Charles Dickens" *Essays* (New York: Everyman, 1968), 165. Orwell makes the comment in the context of pointing out that English novelists of the nineteenth century, unlike their twentieth century counterparts, "felt at home in the world they lived in."

³⁰ For a baker's dozen: Philip Roth, Zadie Smith, Tim O'Brien, Wallace Stegner, David Lodge, Jonathan Franzen, Alison Lurie, Francine Prose, Donna Tartt, Richard Parrish, Frank Lentricchia, Haruki Murakami, Walter Mosley, and Susan Choi.

a keen ear for medical jargon, describing entire operations in stunning detail. For example:

The next case was a craniotomy for a meningioma in a fifty-three-year-old woman, a primary school headmistress. The tumour sat above the motor strip and was sharply defined, rolling away neatly before the probing of his Rhoton dissector – an entirely curative process. Sally closed that one up while Perowne went next door to carry out a multi-level lumbar laminectomy on an obese forty-four-year-old man, a gardener who worked in Hyde Park. He cut through four inches of subcutaneous fat before the vertebrae were exposed, and the man wobbled unhelpfully on the table whenever Perowne exerted downwards pressure to clip away at the bone. (6-7)

Saturday is full of such passages, the language striking an easy balance between the technical and familiar, the ominous-sounding “multi lumbar laminectomy” appearing next to that detail about Hyde Park. During an operation on a fourteen year-old Nigerian girl, for instance, Perowne removes a “pilocytic astrocytoma” from her brain; a tricky procedure, we’re told, as the tumor must be reached by “an infratentorial supracerebellar route” (8). Later during a visit to his mother in a nursing home Perowne recalls that “elevated levels of lipoprotein-a are said to have a robust association with multi-infarct dementia” (159). On the street, Perowne is the victim of a mugging, but retains the presence of mind to make an on-the-spot diagnosis: his assailant’s facial tics, he correctly guesses, are caused by “reduced levels of GABA among the appropriate binding sites on the striatal neurons” (84). Observing a heroin addict on the sidewalk outside his apartment Perowne ponders the mysterious twists of

fate that have made his daughter a successful poet while this other woman of the same age is bound as tightly to her misery as an “opiate to its mu receptors” (43). With every page, Saturday’s parade of medical vocabulary goes marching on: “trigeminal ganglion,” “vestibular schwannoma,” “radiofrequency coagulation,” “posterior frontal glioma,” “transphenoidal hypophysectomy,” “exogenous opioid-induced histamine reaction.”

Of course, since Saturday is a novel about a brain surgeon, we shouldn’t wonder at a pituitary gland or two, but the medical language in Saturday is so overwhelming that it’s easy to begin to feel as if a rather sneaky rhetorical strategy might be going on, and it’s worth pointing out that the vast majority of people who read Saturday will have no idea what these terms mean. Ultimately this works to McEwan’s advantage, since McEwan establishes a considerable part of his novelistic authority by presuming an advanced state of the division of labor among his readers and then exploiting their ignorance of a certain profession – in this case, neurosurgery, but one could imagine a novelist doing something similar with botany or the law or hog rendering. The aim of the medical vocabulary in Saturday is rhetorical rather than descriptive; its purpose isn’t to give the reader any substantial insight into the function of the brain – really we know just as little about it by the end of the novel as we did at the beginning – but to mark what is “authoritative.” The reader’s ignorance of the surgical profession is a crucial element in establishing the novel’s “realism.” Every time the eye juts up against one of McEwan’s jargon words the critical sense is dulled to a degree. The result is a kind of inverse Brechtian effect, in which alienation generates awe instead of independent thinking, the novel ultimately relying on a strategy of imposed unfamiliarity to create its desired version of reality.

McEwan’s is an extreme form of a tendency that’s quite common in literary fiction these days, in which specialized terminology functions like a kind a rhetorical sword.

Here, for example, is a sentence from Jonathan Franzen's The Corrections, where the subject is literary theory: "Chip was neither a lesbian or a Filipina, as Lopez was, but he'd taught Theory of Feminism, and he had a hundred-percent voting record with the Queer Bloc, and he routinely packed his syllabi with non-Western writers, and all he'd really done in Room 23 of the Comfort Valley Lodge was put into practice certain theories (the myth of authorship; the resistant consumerism of transgressive sexual (trans)act(ion)s) that the college had hired him to teach" (187). Here is another, from a short story by David Foster Wallace (advertising): "Needham both made regular use of such types because of certain data suggesting meaningful connections between melanin quotients and continuous probability distributions of income and preference on the US East Coast, where over 70% of upmarket products tested" (21). Or going back a few years, another from John Updike's Rabbit at Rest (cardiology): "Twenty percent of PTCA patients wind up having a CABG eventually anyway," said the doctor – "that's percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty versus coronary artery bypass graft" (227). Granted, these examples come from very different kinds of writers, but they each display a certain prowess in specialized vocabularies, and especially in the first two, the reader's comprehension of the subject-matter isn't even taken into consideration; in fact, it would be better, so the logic goes, if the reader *didn't* understand completely, if a slight befuddlement were the result of every mention of a "melanin quotient" or a "myth of authorship."

Moreover, this kind of rhetorical acrobatics on the part of novelists is sustained and encouraged by the publishing industry. Reviews of Saturday were quick to praise McEwan's descriptive skills. In *The Washington Post*, Michael Dirda marveled at the novel's "meticulous research," which included "astonishing pages of description, including close-ups of brain surgery that I could not bear to read."³¹ Other critics were

³¹"Shattered." Washington Post. 20 March 2005: T1.

equally impressed by McEwan's acrobatic set-pieces: Caroline Moore in *The Telegraph* praised the "terrifying tours de force" in which McEwan "pulls out all the stops to describe...the structure of the brain's tentorium, exposed in an operation to remove a tumor,"³² while Ruth Scurr in Britain's *Sunday Times* noted McEwan's bravery in "daring to cross the divide" between the public and the medical profession, where "doctors see real lives fall to pieces in their consulting rooms or on their operating tables, day in, day out."³³ As if seeking to quell any doubt about his credentials, McEwan includes a note of acknowledgment at the end of the novel in which he thanks the various members of the medical profession who over the course of two years have shared their expertise with him:

I am enormously grateful to Neil Kitchen, MD, FRCS (SN), Consultant Neurosurgeon and Associate Clinical Director, The National Hospital for Neurology and Nuerosurgery, Queens Square, London. It was a privilege to watch this gifted surgeon at work in the theatre over a period of two years, and I thank him for his kindness and patience in taking time out of a demanding schedule to explain to me the intricacies of his profession, and the brain, with its countless pathologies. I am also grateful to Sally Wilson, FRCA, Consultant Neuro-anaesthetist at the same hospital, and to Anne McGuinness, Consultant, Accident and Emergency, University College Hospital, and to Chief Inspector Amon McAfee. For an account of a transsphenoidal

³² "A Brutal Invasion of Privacy." *Telegraph*. 1 Feb. 2005: C5.

³³ "Happiness on a Knife-edge." *Sunday Times*. 29 Jan. 2005: D8. Not every reviewer was satisfied with McEwan's virtuosity, however. John Banville criticized McEwan for being "wearingly insistent on displaying his technical knowledge and his ability to put that knowledge into good, clean prose. This is the case especially in the medical scenes, of which there are many, too many...the numerous set pieces...are hinged together with the subtlety of a child's erector set." "A Day in the Life." *New York Review of Books*. 26 May 2005. 59:2.

hypophysectomy, I am indebted to Frank T. Vertosick, Jr., MD, and his excellent book, *When the Air Hits Your Brain: Tales of Neurosurgery*, Norton, New York 1996. Ray Dolan, that most literary of scientists, read the typescript of *Saturday* and made incisive neurological suggestions. (290)

Of the many interesting points this raises about the status of the novel as a genre today – that phrases like “meticulous research” are more commonly associated with the hard sciences than novel criticism, for instance, or that in “daring” to expose the hidden realities of the medical profession, McEwan sounds more like a species of investigative reporter than a novelist – perhaps the most interesting is the radical departure from a traditional understanding of relationship between the novelist and society. Going back to the early eighteenth century, the ideal of the novelist has generally been that he or she be independent from society, with the only thing standing in his way being the necessity of making a living. According to this view, the novelist should be free to represent his subject-matter however he sees fit, free to criticize and interpret society from an independent point of view, and it’s generally on the strength of this independent point of view that we judge a novel’s value. And yet in Saturday we see this traditional conception of the novelist as independent social critic give way to the concept of a novelist whose art requires that he must first consult with experts if he is to fulfill the demands of a reading public. Whereas Fielding in the eighteenth century had proposed that the ideal novelist should hold a “universal conversation,” with “all ranks and degrees of men” (Tom Jones 426) – that is, a novelist should use his independence from society to converse with as many different types of people as possible – the model of the novelist we see in Saturday is something along the lines of an envoy between a reading public and a highly specialized field of work, who uses

his particular gifts and skills to illuminate a hidden sector of society. McEwan's purpose isn't to portray a multitude of interwoven experiences, or to present society as a distinct and comprehensive whole – again, up until at least Joyce this was the novelist's ideal, this was what made the novel unique among art forms – but to grant the reader privileged access into the experience of a single “special” individual, an individual who is singled out because of his special training and expertise. McEwan must make this individual accessible to us, humanize him, so to speak, by bridging the professional barriers, whether procedural or linguistic, that separate him from the common understanding, but he must do this without losing sight of the fact that there are likely members of his audience who are themselves holders of this special training and expertise: specialization thus operates on McEwan as a force from two directions, urging him towards the representation of a highly particularized experience, while at the same time demanding that this representation correspond to the facts as they are known to those who share this same highly particularized experience. To err too far in the first regard would be to fail to make this representation appeal to the non-specialist; to err too far in the second would be to affirm what John Banville concludes in a scathing review of Saturday: “If Tony Blair were to appoint a committee to produce a “novel for our time,” the result would surely be something like this.”³⁴

These are considerations of which the division of labor is at the center, and I've spent this time discussing Saturday not only because I think it's an excellent example of the kinds of pressures that specialization may exert on the novelist, but also because it's a convenient way to illustrate a crucial historical point: that changes in the underlying sociological character of the division of labor over time can bring about formal changes in the novel, influencing features as various as point of view, characterization, and description. What might appear to be a matter of simple

³⁴ “A Day in the Life.”

difference in narrative technique – Fielding’s “universal conversation,” for instance, versus McEwan’s narrow “specialized” perspective – reflects the difference between two kinds of historical consciousness, one that sees the various competing interests in society as universally accessible from a single point of view, and one that sees society made up of a patchwork of different threads of experience that can be made “visible” only by consulting with experts familiar with each particular area. The first kind of historical consciousness is the product of an eighteenth century society in which generalized notions about public experience were still largely intact, while the second owes its origins to the explosive growth of professional specialization in the nineteenth century, in which private interests began to invade the social space previously occupied by the public realm.³⁵ In Commissioned Spirits, Jonathan Arac argues that this process brought about a fundamental change in the novelistic representation of experience:

Self-consciousness may open out joyful prospects, but it poses as well many problems for the writer. For a few years, the stance of overview allowed a working distance from society, from which a writer could readily return with fresh knowledge and intervene in the world. But a growing sense of distance shadowed the writer’s relation to society, making the return more difficult. Professionalization and specialization began once again to segregate the elements that had come together briefly to make possible the social novel of the early 1850s. “Experience” no longer was something easily shared in a public work

³⁵ The story of this change has been told repeatedly, by a number of different commentators. See Richard Sennet, The Fall of Public Man (New York: Norton 1992), Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), and Jurgen Habermas, The Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society (Cambridge: MIT P, 1991)

through an apprehensible shape of action; instead it became an obscure private domain only to be hinted at with a language itself contaminated by convention. (12)

Prior to the 1850s, there was a general assumption among novelists and readers that narrow professional and occupational concerns ought to be excluded from the novel, since they were too specialized to be of any immediate interest to the reading public. In eighteenth and early nineteenth century novels, for instance, one finds the view that in skipping over certain specialized details novelists avoid boring their readers with extraneous information. When Fielding tells us in Tom Jones that a legal conferral between two characters is too obscure to bother including in the novel (621), for instance, or when Trollope in Barchester Towers says of the installation of a bishop that he won't bother describing the ceremony because he "doesn't precisely understand its nature" (18), or when Dickens in Nicholas Nickelby has Kate Nickelby go to work in a milliner's at which "several things were done, known only to those cunning in the arts of dress-making" (137), the common appeal is to a broad-based notion of the public sphere, which takes precedence over the representation of narrow specialized interests. Moreover, because the idea of the public these authors had in mind was a reflection of genteel upper-class British society, occupations that were considered "low" – certainly dress-makers (one can presume that Dickens's audience contained few members of that class), but also surgeons and apothecaries – received scant attention, unless it was to ridicule or satirize them. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, such frank admissions of ignorance had fallen out of favor, as novelists focused greater amounts of attention on the details of particular types of work. One thinks of George Eliot and her notebooks full of esoteric facts on everything from the use of manganese in printing to the treatment of delirium tremens,

of Zola in the mines, of the exhaustive measures taken by Joyce to get Bloom's advertising job in Ulysses "just right." Imagine the absurdity if Hemingway had written, "And the soldiers went over the hill and did several things known only to those cunning in the arts of soldiery."

Just how much eighteenth century attitudes differ from modern attitudes in this regard can be seen by contrasting the representation of medical discourse in Saturday with that of Fielding's in Tom Jones. In Book VII of Tom Jones, Tom is injured in a fight and a surgeon is sent for. After the examination, he recalls a former case:

I was once, I remember, called to a patient who had received a violent contusion in his tibia, by which the exterior cutis was lacerated, so that there was a profuse sanguinary discharge; and the interior membranes were so divellicated that the os or bone very plainly appeared through the aperture of the vulnus or wound. Some febrile symptoms intervening at the same time (for the pulse was exuberant and indicated much phlebotomy), I apprehended an immediate mortification. (332)

So conditioned are we today to equate technical vocabulary with professional competence that you could imagine someone misreading this passage as a sympathetic portrayal, yet it's entirely satirical. The target of the satire is, of course, the intellectual snobbery of the surgeon, but it's also the language's lack of utility: if "os" means bone, and "vulnus" wound, the scene asks, why not simply use the word everyone knows? Why go through the trouble of making things more complicated than they really are? The burden of proof is placed on the surgeon's language, rather than the physical conditions the language might describe, the underlying assumption

being, of course, that medicine is a liberal field of knowledge rather than a hard science, which means that to Fielding's mind there's no privileged order of reality to which the surgeon alone has access. In fact, as the scene progresses, the landlady of the hotel where Jones is staying gives him folk remedies – sack whey, chicken broth, jellies – that are ultimately better for him than anything the surgeon has to offer. Clearly we're meant to look past the jargon and suspect the surgeon of some underlying motive, that he lives in a self-absorbed world, like so many Swift characters. Satire of this nature takes on a reactionary quality, since by ridiculing discourses that in another context might prove alienating or threatening, readers could conceive of themselves as belonging to a common humanity, united by a shared set of speech characteristics. Ridiculing the language of the surgeon, then, is both a way of subverting his claim to authority and reaffirming the authority of a "common" language, the language of a "public ordinary, to which all people are welcome for their money," to quote the first sentence of Tom Jones. In the eighteenth century novel, specialized vocabularies are isolated, marginalized, and pushed outside the bounds of accepted discourse, a reflection of eighteenth century cultural attitudes towards specialization itself – that it was eccentric, harmful, and generally to be avoided by gentlemen of good breeding.

This novelistic shift in attitude corresponds with a period of massive change in the division of labor, a period of increasing specialization in the economic and social order of industrial society.³⁶ If there is a greater emphasis on work in the late-

³⁶ For the following account of professionalization, I'm indebted to two accounts. Magali Larson's sociological analysis, The Rise of Professionalism (Berkeley: California UP, 1977) is by far the most thorough, although she gives as much attention to America as Britain. Harold Perkins's Origins of English Society (London: Routledge, 1969) explores the rise of professionalism within the larger context of the Industrial Revolution. See also, W.J. Reader, Professional Men (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1966). Several works of literary criticism also discuss the rise of professionalism. See Lawrence Rothfield, Vital Signs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Alexander Welsh's George Eliot and Blackmail (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), pp. 33-84, Alan Mintz's George Eliot and The Novel of Vocation (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978), pp. 13-20, James Eli Adams's Dandies and Desert Saints

nineteenth century novel, this was because the older Puritan notion of the calling had begun to merge with the newer forms of occupation brought about by the industrial revolution, which meant the religious ideal of working one's personal salvation had been secularized into the modern ideal of working for the betterment of society. Prior to this period of change, Britain had been a semi-feudal aristocracy with most of the wealth in land; afterwards it was a nation of jobholders, with the most of the wealth in accumulated capital. Throughout the nineteenth century, there is a proliferation of new occupations, created to fulfill the technical needs of the industrial revolution; an induction of older occupations into the newer status of "professional;" and a flexibility of social movement between occupations, irrespective of the class divisions of the eighteenth century.

Of the novelists who explored the intricacies of these changes, perhaps none did so with as much breadth and sophistication as George Eliot. Middlemarch stands as a kind of historical midpoint between Fielding's "universal conversation" and McEwan's more specialized perspective, a bridge between two radically different ways of picturing the relationship between the novelist and society. In fact, Eliot herself seems to draw this distinction in the opening paragraph of chapter fifteen of Middlemarch, in which she contrasts her own narrative style with the "lusty chat" of Fielding, who "lived when the days were longer...and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings" (170). Distancing herself again from Fielding, the narrator insists that "we belated historians must not linger after his example," and the main thing distinguishing the narrator of Middlemarch from Fielding is a sense of urgency: the former "has so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this

(Cornell: Cornell UP, 1995), and David Trotter's Paranoid Modernisms: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001).

particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe” (170). A strong disciplinary ethos hangs over the passage: the narrator must not “linger,” cannot be “tempted,” realizes that “time, like money, is measured by our needs,” and the result is not only to present the narrator as burdened with a moral task more weighty than Fielding’s, but to make the narrator seem like a symbiosis of the novel’s two main protagonists: like Dorothea, the narrator’s “living pettiness” is overshadowed by others, while like Lydgate she must “unravel certain human lots” with the most exacting specificity.

Eliot is conscious that in emphasizing “this particular web” at the expense of “that tempting range of relevancies called the universe” she distinguishes between her own craft and Fielding’s, and it’s difficult not to draw analogies with the specialized study of medicine, since this is the chapter that introduces Lydgate. But to more fully understand the extent to which the division of labor informs Eliot’s narrative practice, it might be helpful to look back at an earlier essay, “The Natural History of German Life,” in which Eliot argues in a much more forceful matter that the judgment of the expert is superior to that of the man of “wide views and narrow observation.”

The word *railways*, for example, will probably call up, in the mind of a man who is not highly locomotive, the image either of a “Bradshaw,” or of the station with which he is most familiar, or of an indefinite length of tram-road; he will alternate between these three images, which represent his stock of concrete acquaintance with railways. But suppose a man to have had successively the experience of a “navy,” an engineer, a traveler, a railway director and share holder, and landed proprietor in treaty with a railroad company, and it is probable that the range of images which would by turns present themselves to his mind

at the mention of the *word* ‘railways,’ would include all the essential facts in the existence and relation of the *thing*. Now it is possible for the first-mentioned personage to entertain very expanded views as to the multiplication of railways in the abstract, and their ultimate function in civilization. He may talk of a vast network of railways stretching over the globe, of future “lines” in Madagascar, and elegant refreshment-rooms in the Sandwich Islands, with none the less glibness because his distinct conceptions on the subject do not extend beyond his station and his indefinite length of tram-road. But it is evident that if we want a railway to be made, or its affairs to be managed, this man of wide views and narrow observation will not serve our purpose. (17)

Eliot isn’t here addressing the novel *per se*, but this passage does serve as a preamble to an extended discussion of the novelistic representation of the laboring class, which Eliot criticizes for being picturesque and overly-sentimental (Dickens is a case in point, of whom she says “he scarcely ever passes from the humorous and external to the emotional and the tragic, without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness”), and the image of expertise corresponds to her view of the ideal novelist. To Eliot’s mind the novelist is no longer the gentleman of good breeding and liberal perspective, surveying the social landscape from a position of time-honored authority, as it was for Fielding, but the expert, the individual whose particular training grants him a special insight into the reality beneath the surface of things. That Eliot has the division of labor chiefly in mind is evident later in the essay, when she writes that “the landholder, the clergyman, the mill-owner, the mining-agent, have each an opportunity for making precious observations on different sections of the working-class, but unfortunately their

experience is too often not registered at all, or its results are too scattered to be available as a source of information and stimulus to the public mind generally” (23). Without a proper acknowledgment of particulars, she insists, the broad view is insufficient: the division of society into separate specialized functions serves Eliot as a useful metaphor for the perspective of a new, modern novelist who sees society as no longer configured solely along class boundaries, but also in terms of occupation, a novelist who must answer the challenge of the age by moving beyond “lusty chat” and acquiring through patient study the knowledge determined by a multitude of specialized experiences.

What’s interesting about this perspective is that it corresponds to the development of the professions in the nineteenth century, which were heavily in favor of specialization. There had been an aversion to specialization in the general institutional character of the professions in the eighteenth century, which were much more geared towards promoting a broad, liberal view of the arts and sciences, than encouraging research into independent areas of expertise. The Latin curriculum at Oxford, for instance, which was the same for all three professions, was designed with the expectation that after a proper immersion in the classics, a gentleman ought to be able to teach himself how to learn. Specialization, if it occurred at all, took place outside of mainstream institutional frameworks, which lent it an air of eccentricity and vanity. As W.J. Reader puts it, “technical training might be good enough for the narrow purposes of the craftsman or trader, but for a gentleman who might have to deal with wide issues of government and policy, it was much more important to grasp general principles of intellectual activity” (10). This is the spirit of Fielding’s “universal conversation,” which promotes the virtues of a wide breadth of knowledge and conversation. But the spirit of Eliot’s novels reflects the changes of the following century: whereas professional status in the eighteenth century had generally been

limited to the three learned professions of law, divinity, and medicine, each of which was tightly controlled by the aristocracy and whose membership was determined by family connections, in the nineteenth century the professions became much more heterogeneous, covering occupations as diverse as engineering, architecture, and pharmacology. The word “professional” itself came to refer less to a privileged wing of the aristocracy than a flexible ideal embodied by a growing middle-class, as occupations that had been considered trades in the eighteenth century, such as surgeons and apothecaries, as well as newer occupations that arose to meet the industrial revolution’s increasing demand for technical expertise, were invested with a much greater degree of authority in the nineteenth century, the indices of which were the strict new institutional measures that defined professional competence, such as the license, the diploma, and the exam. Signs of this are everywhere in Middlemarch, from Lydgate’s fusion of surgery with medical research, to Fred Vincy’s passing his bachelor’s examination. But the point is that in her whole way of thinking about fiction, Eliot embodied a trend towards specialization in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, as Mary McCarthy argues in Ideas and the Novel, even Eliot’s narrative style evinces a kind of division of labor, as she shifts now and again from her own deeply earnest voice, to the voice of Lydgate, Casaubon, or Caleb Garth.³⁷ In representing the consciousness of a surgeon, or a scholar, or farmer, Eliot is always careful to show how the specific kind of work has shaped the individual character: as she argues in the “Natural History of German Life” the goal isn’t to see these roles as abstractions, but to get inside the work, to understand it from the point of view of the practitioner. Note, for instance, this scene from Adam Bede: “Look at Adam through the rest of the day, as he stands on the *scaffolding* with the *two-feet ruler* in his hand, whistling low while he considers how a difficulty about a *floor-joist* or a *window-*

³⁷ See Ideas and the Novel. (New York: Harcourt P, 1980), 34.

frame is to be overcome...” (227) [emphasis mine]. Whereas another novelist might list the details of Bede’s person – his dress, his appearance, his dialect – Eliot shows the work from Bede’s point of view, calling the tools of his trade by the names Bede himself would call them. Character here is a matter of action, of expertise, of making and building and measuring, rather than a static description of a figure standing on a scaffold, as Eliot adopts a specialized point of view so as to allow her bourgeois readers a privileged glimpse into a kind of work that in their day to day lives is far removed from their own experience. Her authority as a realist owes a great deal to such moments, since by presuming an advanced state of the division of labor among her audience, Eliot sharpens her readers’ abstract notions of carpentry with the clear and unmistakable power of a term. A similar technique is at work in Middlemarch, except here it becomes much more sophisticated, since the novel is inundated with language drawn from the professional registers of science and medicine. In Middlemarch, as Lawrence Rothfield has noted, Eliot plays the role of intermediary between a highly specialized field of knowledge and the general reading public: “Eliot’s fiction could be said to aim at transmitting scientific truth to bourgeois culture. As mediator, she attempts to educate the reader by representing the same fact that the scientist has shown her” (193). Specialized language is deployed in Middlemarch to mark differences in consciousness, differences in moods and desires: for instance, we find that Casaubon takes a wife to “adorn the remaining quadrant of his course, and be a little moon that would cause hardly a calculable perturbation” (120). The combination of the trite of metaphor of the moon with those more rarified words – “quadrant,” “calculable,” “perturbation” – marks Casaubon with a scholarly eccentricity that is quite different, say, from the precise words that denote Lydgate’s scientific passions: “he longed to demonstrate the more intimate relations of living structure and help to define men’s thought more accurately after the true order” (178).

In each case, the language comes with different evaluations, different concrete intentions, which evoke the character's specialized role in the novel. In this way, Eliot wedds vocation and consciousness at the level of form: just as we are told by the narrator that Lydgate is a surgeon who intends to do "small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world" (178) we see how this vocation has conditioned his thoughts, determined the way he speaks and moves and relates to the world.

The point I've been trying to get at here is that over the course of the last three hundred years a significant shift has occurred in the way that novelists approach the problem of work. Historical pressures have conspired to shape the novel's form: of course, we have no way of knowing what kinds of research Fielding did to write the surgeon's dialogue in Tom Jones, whether he consulted a doctor or perused a medical textbook, but it's a safe bet that whatever it was, it didn't take him the two years of research McEwan needed to write Saturday, or the extremes George Eliot went through to familiarize herself with contemporary medical study in order to write Middlemarch. Clearly, whatever cultural pressures existed to make McEwan and Eliot to spend large periods of time investigating the professional lives of surgeons didn't exist for Fielding. Underlying this shift is the complex process of sociological and historical change that goes by the name of professionalization. The diversity of specialization brought about by this process provided novelists with the opportunity to adopt representational strategies that were configured as much around the distinctions between occupations as they had been around traditional class boundaries, opening up a whole new range of what Bakhtin refers to in Discourse and the Novel as the "*professional* stratification of language, in the broad sense of the term professional: the language of the doctor, the businessman, the politician, the public education teacher and so forth" (1211). If satire in the eighteenth century served to reinforce a common sense humanity by establishing the parameters of a common set of speech

characteristics, novels after the industrial revolution have tended to suggest the opposite, that our professional communities are ultimately unknowable, composed of competing threads of knowledge that day by day grow beyond the conceptual grasp of any single individual.

The risk of this, of course, is that the novel will cease to function as a unifying art form, instead merely replicating the idiosyncrasies of various subsets within society, and to some degree, Saturday could be accused of just this: the novel reads like a loosely connected series of expertly-crafted set pieces: the perfect brain operation, the perfect squash game, the perfect blues gig. The point is, however, that this isn't merely the result of aesthetic decision on McKewan's part, but is the result of a history, a history that involves the relationship between the division of labor and the knowability of society. A history of the novel should take this relationship into account, showing where it marks its influence on the novel in the form of language and concrete intentions.

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